

The War of the Dead: After the End

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Summary: Eight months after a zombie apocalypse, two high school friends, a punk rocker and a dragon meet in a ruined Massachusetts town. From there, they travel north in search of the one thing that may save their world. Along the way, they gain many allies- and enemies. Part post-apocalyptic epic, part mega-crossover, with elements from How to Train Your Dragon, Pokemon, and Portal.

1. Prologue

****Hey! Welcome to the first real fanfiction I ever wrote!****

****I started this back in 2011 and finished it in June 2013. I decided today that I'm going to put it up on here. It's basically a massive crossover of me and my friends fighting zombies along with dragons and other things. I listed it as an HTTYD/Pokemon crossover because those are the two franchises I borrow the most from. The storyline, however, is false.****

****I've changed some names of people and towns, by the way. Just saying.****

****Disclaimer: I don't own any of the copyrighted material presented in this story.****

****Now, onto the Prologue.****

* * *

><p>Prologue

****Chicago, Illinois****

It was six o'clock in the morning. The sun had just risen, the city was quiet, and Ben was speeding through the ruined streets in his red 2009 Dodge Viper. In one hand he gripped the steering wheel, his fingers tapping to the beat of a song by the punk-rock band Still

We're Forgotten, his favorite band. In the other hand he held an Uzi.

Ben was an eighteen-year-old of average height and build. He had short, curly brown hair, and brownish eyes. He wore a dark grey sweatshirt, blue jeans, and glasses.

He spotted a zombie up ahead. He waited until it got closer, than in one swift movement, without even slowing down, he pointed the gun out the window at the zombie and fired. The three bullets fired from the gun hit the zombie right between the eyes. It fell to the ground, and the wall behind it was splattered with blood.

He kept driving.

In the world after the zombie infestation, he was one of the few survivors who was still living well. Sure, he had some trauma, and missed his friends and family every day. But there was nothing that could be done about that, and he got his revenge, many times over, every single day.

Killing zombies was his job. The zombies had to be put down. One way or the other, the job had to be done. They weren't people anymore; they weren't even animals, and he was going to kill them. He saw no harm in having some fun with it.

These days, he was a wanderer. He went where he felt like going, and did what he felt like doing. Right now, he was heading west. He wasn't sure why he wanted to go west, he just knew he did.

During his spare time, he ran a traveling radio station, EOD Radio, from his car. Every few hours, he would spend a half an hour or so talking, and the rest of the time he would spend playing his music. He thought of it as his own Galaxy News Radio.

He saw another group of zombies up ahead. Coincidentally, the song on his radio had changed to "Undead" by Hollywood Undead. He slowed down a bit and gunned the zombies down in a rain of bullets and blood.

Five zombies.

Five rounds.

After a few more minutes of driving and shooting, the song changed again. This time it was another Still We're Forgotten song. It was only moments after that Ben saw him.

At first he thought it was just another zombie, and he was holding up his Uzi when he saw something else. The man's fist was in the air, and the thumb was sticking out.

As far as he knew, zombies didn't hitchhike. He put his gun down and eased his foot onto the brake.

By the time the car came to a complete stop, he knew the man wasn't a zombie. Zombies could barely walk; they moved sluggishly and aimlessly. This man walked straight, and with purpose.

When the car was completely still, and the man was walking up to the

window, he realized something else.

"No fucking way," he said, incredulous.

Standing before him, dirty and thin from months on the road, but very much alive, was Trent, lead singer of Still We're Forgotten. Ben wasn't sure what his last name was. Come to think of it, he didn't think anyone did.

He was of about the same stature as Ben, except a little taller. He was a thin African American man with brown eyes, medium length black hair, and a mostly clean-shaven face. He was wearing a black sweatshirt and a pair of blue jeans, and his arms were lined with tattoos.

"Hey," said Trent. "Mind if I hitch a ride? I need to get somewhere."

"Not at all," said Ben. "Get in."

Trent jumped over the door and into the passenger's seat, placing the backpack he was wearing on his lap. "You're Trent, aren't you?" asked Ben.

"Yep," he said. "That'd be me."

"Dude, I pretty much worship your music."

"I can see that," he said, gesturing at the radio. His music was still playing.

"Where are you heading?" asked Ben. "I'll drive you wherever."

"Well, right now I'm heading for a house on the other end of the city," said Trent. "After that, who knows?"

"What house?" asked Ben.

Trent pulled out a map. "I'll guide you there. Keep going straight for now."

Ben drove. "So, where's the rest of the band?"

Trent looked out the window, apparently contemplating his response. "Dead," he replied after a few moments. "Or worse."

"Shitâ€¦" said Ben.

"Yeah," said Trent, obviously not wanting to talk about it.

After another minute of nothing but music, Trent glanced at his map and instructed, "Turn right at this intersection up ahead."

Ben turned right. "So what exactly is in this house? Is it your house?" he asked, in quick succession. "You lived here, right?"

Trent thought for a moment, and then replied, "Nah. I've already been to my house. There's something important in this

one."

"What?"

"Well," Trent began. "Still We're Forgotten was always about doing something about the problems in our world, right?"

"Yeahâ€|?"

"Well I'd say these zombies are a big problem."

"So you're trying to do something about it?"

"Yeah. I think I may be on the verge of finding a way to wipe them out completely."

"Is that what's in this house?"

Trent was silent for a moment. Then, he said, "I don't know. But if the answer to this problem isn't here, then at least another clue is."

They kept quiet for a few minutes. During this time, the playlist Ben had set up ended, leaving them in silence. Trent kept guiding him. When they were deep in the city, Trent asked, "You don't happen to have anything to drink, do you?"

"I've got some beer in the back."

"That sounds alright."

Ben pulled the car over and went to get the beer out of the trunk, taking the Uzi with him. He made sure to not take his finger off of the trigger. When he returned with it, Trent held his hand out, and Ben passed him one.

"You know," Trent said while opening the beer, "It's nice to see someone who doesn't want to eat me for a change."

"Same here. Especially someone I know."

"I wish I could say the same thing," Trent chuckled. "Which reminds meâ€| I'm afraid I didn't catch your name."

"Ben," he replied.

"Nice to meet you, Ben."

"Same here. More than nice to meet you."

Trent laughed. "Glad to know I still have fans. Sayâ€| How much of my music do you have anyway?"

A half hour and a bit more than half of a Still We're Forgotten album later, they arrived at Trent's destination.

"Thanks for the ride, Ben," Trent said as he got out of the car.

"Hey," called Ben as Trent started to walk away. "I'll keep a lookout

for you, okay?"

Trent grinned. "Thanks. Oh and by the wayâ€¦ Your car is awesome."

Ben spent the next hour or so watching the house and shooting any zombie that stepped in his range. When Trent finally came back out, he seemed excited about something.

"Drive," he said as soon as he got in the car.

Ben drove. "You seem happy. What's up?"

"I think I found it. The key to everything. I know where it is."

"What?"

"The thing that will put an end to this once and for all. It's all here," he pulled a flash drive out of his pocket. "In this."

"Okayâ€¦ I'm not following. Start at the beginning."

"I always knew this country had skeletons in its closetâ€¦ But you'd never believe exactly how many. And one of them proved to be the death of not only America, but the entire world. They had theseâ€¦ experiments they were doing in labs hidden all around this country. And I just found where the center of the entire operation might be. If we can find itâ€¦ We may be able to wipe out all of the zombies."

"Okay," replied Ben. "I'll take you wherever you need to go. Just so long as you explain to me what the hell it is you're talking about."

"I'll tell you everything as we go," said Trent. "But we need to get to New Hampshire. That's where it is. That's where I need to be."

"New Hampshire it is, then," said Ben. "Looks like I'm going home."

* * *

><p>He watched as the whole scene unfolded.<p>

He watched as Ben met Trent and drove him across Chicago.

He heard their entire conversation.

And now the scene was changing. Faces flashed in front of him. Faces he once knew. Faces of people he had begun to assume dead.

Ben. Sam. Joey. Andrew. Alex. Jean. All of them.

Then the scene changed again. He was in a pitch black room. He couldn't see anything, but he could feel something restraining him.

He heard footsteps behind him.

"Who's there?" he tried to say, but nothing came out.

A light came on. It blinded him; he couldn't see anything, except for a pit in front of him. Something was in it. At first he couldn't tell what, but as his eyes got used to the glare, he realized with horror what it was.

The pit was full of dead bodies.

The bodies were bloody and mangled beyond recognition, but despite that, he knew exactly who they were.

He tried to scream, but he couldn't make a sound. He tried to run, but he couldn't move. Terror coursed through his veins. He felt like he was going to vomit.

And then footsteps, behind him.

They moved closer.

And suddenly, they stopped.

The last thing he felt was hot breath on the back of his neck, and cold, sharp steel pressed against his throat.

He screamed, and was jolted awake. He felt his neck, and looked back.

There was nothing there but the wall.

He breathed heavily, and a feeling of relief swept through him as he realized it had only been a dream.

Or had it?

Above him, a pair of eyes was fixed on him, filled with concern.

"It's okay," he said to their owner. "It was only a dream."

But he knew in his heart that this wasn't true. He didn't want to think of what the last part meant, but he knew the rest. His friends were still alive.

Ben was going home. And it was time he went home too.

* * *

><p>So, I hope you guys liked it! I'll try to have the next chapter up next Sunday! Feel free to leave some feedback, just be nice.

2. Chapter One: The Lonely Road Home

So, here's the first chapter!

**Sorry about the delay, by the way. I've had a really busy weekend.

But you'll be glad to know that this chapter is longer than the last. Also, it brings in the first fanfiction elements of the story.**

I don't own **_How to Train Your Dragon_**** or any of its characters or creature designs.**

Anyway, here we go.

* * *

><p>Part One: Survivors

Chapter One:

The Lonely Road Home

Somewhere south of Lawrence, Massachusetts

On the side of a highway, somewhere south of Lawrence, Matt was standing in the cool, morning air. He was a tall eighteen-year-old, about six feet, with hair such a dark shade of brown that it was often mistaken as black. He had brown eyes, and was wearing a striped, red and grey sweatshirt and black athletic pants. His face was covered with a mustache, a beard, and sideburns. There was a time when he had been overweight, but he wasn't anymore.

Seven months had passed since the end of the world.

As he stood on the edge of the road, looking along the deserted highway, the reality of this fact hit him full-on. Only seven months had passed since America had fallen, and the infection had spread to the rest of the world.

It felt like it had been years.

The infection had originated in several top secret government laboratories hidden across America. They had been doing some experiments, including genetic engineering. He didn't know much else except that one of the experiments had produced a deadly pathogen. The pathogen killed its hosts in a matter of hours, and then turned them into zombies by reactivating a certain part of their brains. After death, the transformation would happen in mere minutes, sometimes as quickly as seconds.

For some reason, the pathogen had been shipped to all of the different labs. And somehow, they all escaped at around the same time. One day, everything was fine. The next day, people started to become sick. And the day after that, everything went to hell.

That day, dubbed "Z-Day" by its survivors, would be forever etched in his head. He and his family had been vacationing in Colorado, in a cabin in the Rocky Mountains. They may have been safe had they been there when the violence began. But they had been in the middle of Boulder. He had been forced to watch as some of his loved ones, and countless strangers, were viciously slaughtered right in front of his eyes.

The police tried to intervene, but the undead had the element of surprise. It took them a while to realize that only a blow to the head could kill the zombies. By that time, only half of the police

were left, and those that had been killed were starting to rise again. It was discovered then that the pathogen affected dead bodies as well.

Over the next week, the survivors were forced to stay in various shelters and defenses, as the police and the armed forces waged a brutal war against the undead. But no matter how many were killed, they kept coming, and the police were overrun. Two weeks after Z-Day, most of the shelters had been destroyed or abandoned, the police force had been wiped out, and half of America had been lost.

During these two weeks, Matt's friends and family were picked off one by one until only he was left.

One month after Z-Day, what was left of the army made a final stand in Pennsylvania. They were overrun, America fell, and the pathogen escaped to the rest of the world. Matt didn't know what happened after that. He heard rumors from some survivors in Denver about Canada and Mexico falling, but that was it. For all he knew, the world was dead.

Seven months after America fell, the world was a bleak and empty place. Deserted cities lay in ruins, and the few survivors that one met were more often than not paranoid and hostile. For the first month, Matt stayed in Colorado, trying to pull himself together. At the time, he was a nervous wreck. But in the end, he picked up the pieces of his shattered psyche, put them back together, and made his decision.

He was going home.

At the time, he didn't think his friends were still alive. But he wanted to be sure. He told himself one or two of them might have survived. Some of his friends were tough; they could pull through. But the more he thought of it, the less he was convinced. Eventually, his journey became the equivalent to a trip to the morgue to identify a body. Morbid and depressing, yes, but it was the only thing he had left.

Back in the present, he heard a noise behind him. He drew his pistol and turned around, preparing to shoot, but relaxed as he saw it was only his friend Shade.

The black dragon walked out of the rest stop they had barricaded themselves in the previous night. He stretched his legs and wings, and yawned. Then he trotted over to Matt and sat next to him.

"Good morning, Shade," Matt greeted. "Did you sleep well?"

Shade crooned in affirmation.

"That's good," said Matt.

For a while they just stood there, enjoying each other's company and the very fact that they were still alive.

Matt and Shade had met about a month and a half after Matt left Colorado. Two weeks prior, he had found a laboratory in Kansas. Inside the laboratory, he found not only information about the zombie pathogen, but also information on the experiments the lab was

doing.

This particular lab had conducted some experiments that were especially interesting to him. They had been trying to genetically engineer dragons. Matt had great interest in dragons, so this discovery had greatly intrigued him. He did some research into it before he left, and found out that the dragons they created were Night Furies, and that during Z-Day, twenty Night Furies had broken out. They were never seen again.

He could barely contain his excitement- but also his disbelief. Night Furies weren't supposed to exist; they were from a movie!

Not two days later, he was proven wrong. He found a Night Fury, or, what was left of one. It had been reduced to a horribly mangled, barely recognizable corpse.

He kept walking. Two weeks later, he met a live one in Missouri.

He came across the Night Fury while he was scavenging for food. The sun was setting, and at first he was unaware of Matt's presence. For a while, the teen just stood off to the side, watching in fascination. He kept his finger on the trigger to be safe, but he knew he would never actually shoot.

The Night Fury in question looked to be a smallish one- smaller than Matt imagined anyway. It was still big enough to be intimidating, however. It was pure black, with bright green eyes, much like Toothless, the Night Fury from How to Train Your Dragon. The sun gleamed off of its scales like a gem. It was beautiful.

After a few minutes, the dragon realized it was being watched. It turned around, and, upon seeing Matt, crouched in its attack position, growling ferociously.

Matt just stood there for a few moments, staring at the beast, into its light-green eyes. Then, slowly, he looked back over his shoulders, making sure there were no zombies sneaking up on him. When he was certain the coast was clear, he dropped his gun.

"I mean you no harm, dragon," said Matt, unsure whether he could understand or not.

The Night Fury's expression briefly changed to one of confusion, and then distrust. Matt took a step closer, but the dragon let out another threatening growl.

"Obviously we're not going to get anywhere like this," Matt pointed out. He remembered that Night Furies were supposedly incredibly intelligent. He decided to test that.

"You're supposed to be smart, right?" asked Matt. "Nod your head if you can understand me."

The dragon continued to stare at him for a while. Whether it was deciding whether or not to oblige, or just unable to understand, Matt didn't know.

"Come on," Matt pressured. "Humor me."

The dragon stared for a few more moments, before finally nodding very slowly.

Matt's heart skipped a beat. _Thisâ€| this is unbelievable! _ He thought. He had a hard time believing that it was actually happening. This had been his dream, but it had been an impossible dream. It was never supposed to come true. But now it wasâ€|

"Okay," continued Matt, pulling his emotions together. "That's a good start."

He took another step forward. The dragon growled again, but not as ferociously.

"Why are you so afraid of me?" asked Matt. "There's no weapon in my hand. You could kill me in two seconds if you wanted to. I should be afraid of you."

The dragon looked slightly less threatened, and more perplexed now. It seemed like it was trying to figure Matt out.

Matt was about to say something else, but his thoughts were quickly cut off as something caught his eye. While the dragon's attention was diverted to him, a group of zombies had formed behind it. There were at least fifty of them, and while an alert dragon would probably be able to kill them all, this one was distracted.

And these zombies looked hungry.

"Shit," Matt muttered, and his hand grabbed instinctively for his pistol.

The dragon saw him go for his gun and roared. It backed up, right into the mob of zombies. Taking him by surprise, they grabbed the reptile and pulled him down. They began ripping, tearing, biting at its flesh, forcing it to the ground in the process. Its scales provided some resistance, but not enough. They would break through them soon. It started roaring and thrashing, trying to throw the zombies off, but for every zombie he killed, two more took its place

Matt drew his gun and started firing into the mob, careful not to hit the dragon. Blood sprayed, and zombies fell, but there were so many of them. He kept firing until the clip ran out. He snatched the AK-47 he had dropped and ran towards the zombies. He opened fire, and the zombies were torn apart by bullets. Blood flew everywhere.

The dragon was still thrashing. He killed some zombies himself; clawed their faces, and even bit one's head clean off. The dragon kept fighting and Matt kept shooting until there were only three left. Finally, it had enough room to use its fire. It opened its mouth, and released a blue fireball, which blew all of the zombies to bits.

Matt examined the bodies for a moment, making sure they were all dead. He looked around and made sure there were no stragglers. When he decided it was safe, he ran across the bloodstained ground to the dragon.

The dragon was covered in blood, and wounded very badly, but it was

still conscious. It whimpered in pain, and when it saw Matt, it didn't react. Maybe he saw him as an ally now, or maybe he just didn't care anymore.

He knelt down and examined the dragon's body. It was badly hurt; there were gashes, bites, torn flesh, and ripped scales all over his body, blood flowing freely from a lot of them. There were even some wounds where Matt's bullets had accidentally grazed it.

He was most concerned about the bites. The pathogen was only spread through bites; more specifically, contact with the blood or saliva of the infected. If you could survive the zombies, and avoid getting bitten or come into contact with their blood, you would be okay.

Matt wasn't sure whether the pathogen was effective on Night Furies or not, but it had him deeply concerned.

"Listen," he said to the dragon. "This is important. Have you been bit before?"

The dragon nodded yes.

"In the last week?"

The scaly beast shook its head.

Maybe they were immune. Or maybe they just took longer to die from it. The dragon had looked healthy when Matt had found it. Malnourished, yes, but otherwise healthy.

He couldn't just leave it like this. He came to a decision.

He took off his backpack and put it on the ground, then rummaged through it, searching for water. When he found a bottle, he opened it and started pouring it over the dragon, washing off the blood and dirt.

"Okay, you've been bit," said Matt. "I don't know if you're immune or not. The evidence suggests that you are, but I'm not completely sold. If you aren't, you're already dead. But if you are, I'm going to help you."

The dragon didn't acknowledge him, but Matt had a feeling that it understood.

He continued to wash off the blood, using as much water as it took. When it was finally gone, he took out his First Aid kit and selected a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

"This is gonna hurt like hell," Matt informed the dragon. "But it's all I've got." He used a cloth to soak some alcohol up, and started cleaning the wounds with it.

The dragon roared in pain, and thrashed around, clawing at Matt instinctively. Matt barely dodged a claw, and stepped back a bit.

"Stop!" he shouted. The dragon didn't listen to him, so he just waited for it to calm down. When he did, Matt said, "I know it hurts."

I know. But if you don't let me do this, you'll die." He paused for a moment, and then added, "I'm trying to save your life here. If you don't want my help, you may be able to survive on your own, but only for a few days at most. If you'd like to live to see another year, I'd let me finish."

The dragon stared at him, an expression of resentment on its face. Then, finally, it rested his head down and let Matt continue.

He continued cleaning the dragon's wounds. The reptile grunted and growled, and occasionally roared with pain, but it was evident it was trying to hold it in. Matt tried to distract the beast every once in a while with conversation. One time, he asked, "Soâ€¦ Are you a male?"

The dragon nodded.

"Well, that's helpful. I'd really prefer not to call you an it. You're too intelligent for that."

Finally, Matt was done with the rubbing alcohol on this side of the dragon and started to bandage the wounds up. But the other side had been wounded badly as well. "Can you stand up?" he asked when he was done.

The dragon attempted at getting to its feet. The first time, he fell back down, but the second time he managed to stand up.

"I need to do this side too," Matt explained. "You can lay back down." The dragon laid back on his other side while Matt repeated the cleaning process. When Matt finally finished, he bandaged this side as well.

He took a brief moment to make sure there were no zombies in the area before continuing. Eventually, he ran out of bandages, so he took some extra clothes he had in his backpack and tore them into strips, which he then used instead. Several minutes, and a lot of effort from the dragon later, all of his wounds were bandaged. Matt put the First Aid kit away, and stood up.

"Do you think you can walk?" He asked. "You need to get somewhere safe."

The dragon nodded, but his expression was one of pain.

"Okay," said Matt. "There were some abandoned houses up the road. They're mostly intact. Follow me, but let me know if something's wrong."

Slowly, they made their way to the houses. The dragon limped most of the way, and collapsed a couple of times, but he was able to make it, with Matt helping to support his weight as much as he could.

They found a house that the dragon could get into. Matt searched the house, making sure there were no surprises waiting for them. When he found nothing, he set to work on boarding it up.

The house had two stories. It was dusty, unkempt, and cold from months of abandonment, but otherwise it was a good shelter. The dragon limped into the living room and lay down in front of the

fireplace and slipped into a temporary sleep. Meanwhile, Matt found a pile of extra wood in the basement, and used it to board up the windows and create a makeshift latch for the door. When he was done, he brought some more wood upstairs and placed it in the fireplace.

By the time he was done, the dragon had returned from his slumber, and was studying him curiously. Matt had saved him, and he was the only person that could help him now. But he wasn't sure whether it was out of kindness or some other, more sinister motive. He was giving him the benefit of the doubt for now, but he was still keeping an eye on him.

Matt stepped aside and looked at the dragon. "Think you could light this for me?" he asked.

The dragon looked at the fireplace. With a single puff of breath, he shot a burst of flame and lit the logs.

"Thanks." Matt sat down in a chair facing the dragon. "Soâ€¦ I don't really want to just call you Dragon all the time. Do you have a name?"

The dragon shook his head.

"Really?" Matt asked, surprised. "They never gave you a name? That's kind ofâ€¦ mean, actually." He paused, and then asked, "Would you like a name?"

The dragon thought for a moment. Eventually, he shrugged

"Hmmmâ€¦" Matt thought. "I'll see if I can think of something."

He stared blankly into the fire for a minute, deep in thought. It wasn't long until old memories were stirred up in his head; memories of Before. He had been a huge fan of How to Train Your Dragon back then; he had often gone on the internet just to talk to other fans. He would role play with these people, and had even created his own dragon character.

Shade.

Yes, Matt thought. Shade. "How about Shade?" he asked.

The dragon thought for a moment, then nodded.

"Well, I guess that's what I'll call you." Matt stood up and walked over to the dragon, now called Shade. "My name's Matt, by the way. It's nice to meet you, Shade." He reached down to pat him on the head, but he let out a small warning growl.

"I see," said Matt. "You don't trust me, do you?" He sighed, and sat down. "I can't say I blame you. But think about this; if I wanted to kill you, I would've done it already."

Shade thought about this. It made sense to him. But still; he wanted to be safe. He would keep his guard up for a little longer.

By this time, the sun had gone down. Matt realized this, and said, "You should get some sleep. You'll need it. I doubt you'll be able to

do much in the next week, and you won't be able to fly for longer," he explained. "I should probably sleep too."

Matt unpacked his sleeping bag from the case he kept slung over his back along with his backpack and laid it out on the couch. Shade slowly scooted away from him, preferring to keep his distance. He didn't trust him yet, and Matt couldn't blame him. But right then, he didn't care. He was with a Night Fury, and that had been his dream.

He fell asleep happy.

* * *

><p>Over the next week, Shade began to become less and less suspicious of Matt. He began to think that maybe Matt was genuinely trying to help. Towards the end, he even started to like him a little bit.<p>

By that time, his wounds were beginning to heal. They were still sore, but the worst of the pain was gone. He still wasn't able to fly, but he could travel now.

"Listen, Shade," Matt said one day. "Tomorrow, I think that you'll be able to leave if you want. But, I don't think that's a good idea. You see," he paused for a moment, trying to find the words. "When you got hurt, I learned that even a dragon needs a friend in this world. People who are alone, be they human, dragon, or whatever, will make mistakes. And those mistakes will kill them if there's nobody around to watch out for them."

Shade thought he knew where this was going. He wasn't sure about it, but he continued listening anyway.

"I think that if the two of us are going to survive, we need to stay together," Matt said. "Think about it."

After a long contemplation, Shade eventually decided to go with Matt. The human had saved his life; and he had made no attempt to hurt him in anyway. And he knew that what he was saying was true; if he continued to wander the country alone, he would die very quickly in his current state. But if he went with Matt, he might actually live.

They left the next day. It turned out Shade was immune to the pathogen after all, and over the next few months, they became closer, and they were more than just partners- they became best friends. They were all each other had left. They became fiercely protective over each other, and would even die for each other.

And now here they were, in Lawrence. Matt could barely hold it together; after six months of traveling, he was almost home. Finally, he would know if his friends were alive. The dream he had had the night before had renewed his hope in finding them, and also added a sense of urgency to their journey for him.

But they weren't there yet.

* * *

><p>After a while of just sitting there, Matt realized he was hungry. "You want some breakfast?" he asked Shade.<p>

Shade nodded, and followed him as he went inside the rest stop. He rummaged through his backpack, and pulled out some meat. "This is all we have left," he observed. "We'll have to find some more in the city."

They lit a fire and began roasting the meat. "How about some music?" Matt suggested. He always kept his iPod charged when he could find a source of electricity, and he always had fresh batteries for his iHome when he could find them. It had been one of the only things that kept him sane before he met Shade, and he kept up with the habit afterwards.

Shade nodded. He loved music. Over that first week, Matt had played it a lot, and Shade had taken a quick liking to it.

Matt put his iPod on shuffle and started playing it while they cooked their food. The dark melodies of Avenged Sevenfold's "Buried Alive" filled the room, along with the crackling of the fire, and the smell of meat.

When the food was done, they sat there and ate. For that small moment in time, with good food, good music, and good company, they could almost forget that the world around them was dead.

Almost.

During this time, Matt took the opportunity to mention his dream. "I had the strangest nightmare last nightâ€|" Shade pricked his ears in curiosity, as Matt explained what had happened.

"I don't knowâ€| it sounds crazy," said Matt. "I mean, Ben meeting up with Trent? Come on. But something about it seemed so _realâ€|_ I don't know."

When they were done, they extinguished the fire, and cleaned up after themselves. They left no trace that they were ever there. Matt wondered briefly if he would ever be here again, but quickly dismissed it. It wasn't important. All that was important now was surviving, and getting home. He slung his huge, black survival backpack over his back, followed by his AK-47. Then, he and Shade stepped out the door.

As they were leaving, Shade grunted. Matt turned around, and saw Shade with his wings spread open. He wanted to fly.

"Look buddy, I told you, you can't fly for another week," he said. "I'm sorry, but if you reopen that cut, you'll have to wait another month to fly again."

To tell the truth, Shade was rather accident prone at times. A few weeks prior, while he was flying, he was distracted for a moment, and got in a particularly nasty crash, leaving a huge gash in his left wing. He was lucky to be alive. Matt had stitched him up, but even now he was still unable to fly.

Shade looked disappointed, but he understood.

They set off down the highway. Man and dragon, two best friends, making their way on the lonely road home.

* * *

><p>Looking back, I don't really like how these old chapters are written, and I feel I'm a much better writer now. However, I still like revisiting the beginning of this story.

Anyway, that's all for this week. I'll try to have a new one on time next Sunday. In the meantime, feel free to leave a review! I love to hear feedback; just be respectful about it.

3. Chapter Two: End of Days

I'm SOOOO sorry I missed the deadline again. Once more, I've had a busy week. But here it is, Chapter Two. And I promise I'll actually try to get the deadline of Sunday right this week.

Anyway, enjoy!

Disclaimer: I don't own **_How to Train Your Dragon_**** or Night Furies.**

* * *

><p>Chapter Two

End of Days

Lawrence, Massachusetts

They reached Lawrence sometime in the afternoon.

Matt and Shade entered the city, prepared for an attack at any moment. It wasn't likely; however, they had to be ready. Those who let their guard down were always the first to die.

Their number one priority was to find food. They found a grocery store near the city limit, with no visible zombies lingering around it. Slowly approaching the entrance, Matt drew his pistol, keeping watch for zombies. He carefully opened the door, held his gun ahead of him, and peered through.

The coast was clear.

He opened the door fully and looked around. The various aisles were obstructing his view, but for now it seemed that they were alone.

He lowered his gun, but didn't holster it, and stepped inside to allow Shade to enter. Closing the door behind them, they started walking down one of the aisles.

The problem one faced when looking for food nowadays was that most of it was either spoiled, or already taken. There were usually certain sections that hadn't been touched much by scavengers, but the more time that passed, the smaller those sections were. Sometimes there weren't any at all.

Despite this, Matt was determined to find something. Anything perishable was out of the question; those had gone bad months ago. Also, the refrigerators no longer worked, so that section was no good either.

They walked through the aisle and found nothing. Matt turned to Shade and said, "We could go left or right, Shade. What do you think?"

Shade sniffed around on the ground for a few moments, than turned to face Matt. He gestured with his head to the right, and started walking. Matt followed.

Using his Night Fury senses, Shade sniffed out what they were looking for. There was still a whole aisle full of unspoiled food. It was mostly snack food, but it would do the job nonetheless. Matt took off his backpack, opened it, and started stuffing it. Shade kept guard; making sure no surprise guests decided to pay them a visit.

When his backpack was three-fourths full, Matt stopped. They had enough to at least get them through the next few days, and they needed some space in their bag for water as well. They were close to running low.

Despite the months that had passed, the water bottles were still good to drink, so long as the seals on them weren't broken. They found the drinks section, and Matt filled the remainder of the backpack. Now, there was only one thing left to do.

After Z-Day, some stores had remained open for a few days as sanctuaries for survivors to rest in before being transported to the refuges. During this short period of time, the employees had started carrying weapons. A lot of people died at their jobs, and they left their guns and ammo behind. There were often some stored in the management office. More ammo meant more survival. After water and food, it was the most important thing someone could have: even more important than shelter.

Matt hadn't seen anything that looked like a management office when they came in, so he assumed that it was located in the back of the store. He and Shade made their way there, the whole time remaining completely alert. When they found the management office, Matt opened the door slowly, and entered in the same manner he did the front entrance.

This time was different, however. This time, something was waiting for him.

He heard a moaning sound, and saw a zombie. He immediately aimed the gun at it. The once-man, now hideously-deformed-monster stood up slowly and stared at him. As soon as it took a step forward, Matt pulled the trigger. The bullet entered its head between its eyes, spraying the wall behind him with blood and cranial matter. It fell to the ground with a dull _thump_.

Matt leaned over its body and examined it. Judging by the uniform it was wearing, it was the former manager of the store. "Think he's dead?" he asked Shade.

Shade nodded.

"Yeah," Matt agreed. "Me too."

He entered the office, and walked over to the manager's desk, carefully stepping over the corpse he had made. He opened drawer after drawer. Office supplies, papers, folders, files, nothing useful. Finally, however, he opened a drawer with a brand new .44 magnum and three packs of ammo.

"Sweet," Matt remarked, storing the gun on his belt and emptying the ammo into the pouch he carried on his side. "Been a while since I used one of these."

He was about to leave, when he noticed the radio. He liked to check radios when he saw them, to see if any stations were still broadcasting. One time, he found a signal from a traveling radio station run by a group of survivors. He never met them, but he took some comfort in knowing that someone else was alive.

He turned on the radio and was greeted by the harsh sounds of static. He turned the knob, checking all of the stations. He was about to give up when he briefly passed what sounded like a voice.

Quickly, he tuned back. He was greeted by a voice, from the sound of it a young man talking.

"_â€|in Lawrence, Massachusetts, today, and let me say this, it sure is a fine day. The sun shining, the streets empty, the bloody bodies everywhere- yep, a great day. Feels good to be home."_

Matt froze.

That voice. He knew that voice.

"_It was only eighteen years ago when I was born in the hospital here. Man, the time flies. This place has changed a lot. For example, back then, cannibalism was considered 'weird.'_"

"_Anyway, I've got a good story for you all. First of all, stay away from the southwest part of the city; that's where Trent and I came in, and there are a lot of hungry zombies down there. We tried running a bunch of them over, but somehow one of them popped my tires, so we had to stop. It might have been the knife in his chest, but who knows right? I got out and distracted them, while Trent went to go find a spare. While he was gone, I picked up about thirty hungry zombies who all thought I looked delicious, so I started running a circle. But then I realized- this isn't _Call of Duty_. So I got to my car, and pulled out my new toy- a minigun. And I shot them all down. Most fun I've had all week."_"

Matt just sat there, listening for a while. Ten minutes later, the broadcast ended, and his suspicions were confirmed.

"_Well, that's all for today. Now, more music. I hope you enjoy it. If you don't, too bad. This is Ben Chretien, End of Days radio, signing off."_"

Matt couldn't believe it.

Ben was not only alive, but he was in Lawrence at that very moment.

And he had mentioned Trentâ€¦

He realized with a jolt that his dream had come true.

"Shadeâ€¦ That's Benâ€¦ and Trentâ€¦ they're here! My dream was real!" he couldn't contain his excitement. "Oh my godâ€¦"

Suddenly, he felt an overpowering need to get outside. He stood up and walked quickly to the door, opening it, and ran towards the front of the store. Shade followed behind him. He burst out of the front door and looked around.

_Where are you? _Matt thought. He looked around, and before he even knew what he was doing, he did the single dumbest thing he had done in a long time.

He opened his mouth, and yelled Ben's name as loud as he could, hoping Ben would hear him.

Silence. Or, better yet, the sound of Matt's stupidity hitting him.

"Shit," he muttered. "I'm so _stupid!_"

Zombies were attracted to two things; loud noises, and fresh blood.

To make things worse, it just so happened that the grocery store was pretty much on the border of the southwestern side of Lawrence, which, as he had just discovered from Ben's broadcast, was teeming with zombies.

Matt drew his magnum and loaded it. "I'm sorry, Shade," He said. "Get ready."

Shade said nothing, only looked around, waiting for zombies to come.

For a minute, nothing happened. Matt was beginning to feel hopeful. Maybe they hadn't heard him. But his hopes were immediately diminished as he saw a group of twenty or so zombies stumbling towards him from the south.

Matt pointed at them with his magnum, holding it with his right hand, and shot. The intense recoil took him by surprise, and he was thrown off balance, causing the bullet to go wide. Then, from somewhere higher up, he heard several loud clangs of metal striking metal. For just a split second, he heard it coming, before his left leg was concealed in a cloud of blood and pain.

"FUCK!" he screamed, falling to his knees. Had he really just shot his own leg? Embarrassment now added itself to the mixed feelings of pain, fear, and adrenaline. His mind felt like it was going to short circuit.

Behind him, he heard Shade roar in shock. A flash of purple fire flew over him, and the zombies exploded in a rain of blood and flaming body parts. One more blast wiped out the survivors.

Matt let out another scream of pain. Tears of rage and agony formed

in his eyes. He had been wounded before, but he had never been shot. It hurt like hell.

Shade stood above him, whimpering and nudging him with his head. Matt reached out with his hand. Shade bowed his head down, allowing Matt to get a handhold. Matt tried to pick himself up in this way, but as soon as he was up he collapsed again. Shade quickly maneuvered himself under Matt, folding his wings tightly against his body, and Matt landed on him.

"Thanks," said Matt. Using Shade as a support, he stood up, and was able to stand. "We need to find somewhere safe so I can patch this up. I'm losing blood."

Shade laid down, allowing Matt easy access to his back. He climbed on top of the Night Fury and held on tight. Shade stood up and started walking down the street.

"Thanks," Matt whispered into his ear.

Blood began to drip off of his leg, and onto the ground. Matt squeezed it, to try to cut of the blood flow, but a few drops still slipped between his fingers.

They found shelter in a small, two-story house. Matt reached over and opened the front door, and Shade managed to squeeze through into a room. There, he sat down, allowing Matt to slide off of his back. Matt crawled over to a couch and sat against it, taking out his First Aid kit.

His leg was covered in blood, and he had lost a lot on the street. They wouldn't be able to leave the house for a while.

Further examination told him the wound wasn't quite as bad as it looked; it hurt like hell, but the bullet had only grazed him. It cut deep, but thankfully it missed the bone, and it was beginning to clot.

"Shade," he said. "Do you think you could see if there are any towels lying around?"

Shade nodded and walked off. He came back a few minutes later carrying a large bathroom towel in his mouth.

"Thanks," Matt said. He took the towel and began to wipe the blood off of his leg. When it was clean, he poured some rubbing alcohol in it, causing his leg to sting even more.

Holding in a cry of pain, Matt muttered, "Remind me to get some new cleaning stuff. This sucks."

Shade nodded in agreement, remembering what had happened when they first met.

When the pain subsided a little, Matt asked, "Hey, Shade, could you go around and make sure there are no zombies in here?"

Shade nodded and left the room again.

When he was done cleaning his wound, he patched it up with bandages.

He then looked around for something to use as support. There was fireplace a few feet away. Next to it was a poker. Better than nothing, Matt thought. I can at least use it as a weapon too, if necessary.

Shade returned a few minutes later. "Anything?" Matt asked. Shade shook his head.

"Okay." Matt got to his feet, using the poker as support. He stumbled a bit, still weak from the pain and the blood loss, but eventually got his balance. He limped over to the window and looked out.

The street was already filling with zombies.

"Looks like we're in a little bit of trouble," Matt observed. He turned to face Shade. "Well, I was going to say we do a little bit of hunting, butâ€" He gestured at the window. "â€"I don't think that's going to happen. So, now we need to find a way to patch these windows and doors up."

Shade nodded in agreement, and they both went to look for materials.

The basement was always the place to find wood. They got lucky, and found just enough to board up all of the windows on the first floor. After about an hour, they had finished. Matt struggled a little bit, but Shade gave him support when he had to use two hands.

When they were all done, they gathered some extra wood, and Shade lit a fire. Matt made a dinner out of canned products and snack foods. It wasn't the best, but it was enough. Matt decided it was too risky to play music, like he usually did, so they ate in silence.

"I'm sorry about earlier, Shade," said Matt. "I acted like a complete idiot. I let my emotions control me. And I don't even know what happened with the gun; I think I forgot how much recoil it had. Iâ€" I'm really sorry."

Shade looked at him, forgiveness in his eyes. He nudged Matt's head in affection.

When night arrived, they completely ignored the bedroom upstairs. Upstairs was possibly the worst place to be, as there was no escape from there if they got cornered. Instead, Matt took out a sleeping bag and slept on the couch. Shade curled up on the floor next to him, letting his wing drape over Matt, providing him with warmth and protection. They were approaching the beginning of winter, and it got awfully cold at night. Sometimes the sleeping bag wasn't enough. Shade, on the other hand, was almost never cold, and gave out body heat like a furnace.

"We'll see what we can do about those zombies tomorrow," Matt proposed. "And we'll see if we can find Ben anywhereâ€" He closed his eyes, and said, "Goodnight, Shade." Then, he slipped away into sleep.

* * *

><p>Well, I hoped you liked it. Next Sunday, things get a bit more interesting.

****Feel free to leave a review! Just be respectful.****

4. Chapter Three: Against the Wall

****Well, here we go! Chapter Three! I would have had it up a bit earlier, but the Oscars are on and I was spending the entire day getting chores and work done so I could watch them.****

****Anyway, in this chapter, things get a little bit more interesting.****

****Again, I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter Three

****Against The Wall****

****Lawrence, Massachusetts****

Matt was dreaming.

He was walking through a seemingly-deserted city. He was calling out names, names he forgot as soon as he yelled them. He felt eyes on him, but he couldn't see their owners. He kept walking, and calling, but received no answers.

A zombie appeared at the intersection ahead. Matt stopped, and reached for his gun, but it wasn't there. He stood still, his heart pounding, holding his breath. The zombie saw him alright, but it didn't move. More zombies, all over the street, wandered out of their hiding places, but not one of them attacked.

Matt turned slowly, looking at all of them. He started walking away, slowly at first, than picking up speed. Still, the zombies didn't give chase. He was now as confused as he was frightened. He started to run.

He turned the corner, and more zombies were there. Just like the last ones, they didn't move. They just stared.

A noise came from behind him. He turned around sharply, just in time to see a shadowy figure run into an alley.

"Who's there?" Matt called.

No response.

Matt walked into the alley, and saw the figure run into a building. Without thinking, he followed it.

The first thing he saw was an elevator. The doors shut as he entered the room, but not in time to prevent him from catching a glimpse of the figure inside. Suddenly, without the slightest ounce of evidence, Matt knew it was heading for the roof.

He ran to the stairwell, desperate to beat them. The building was

fifteen stories high, but somehow he made it without running out of breath.

When he reached the roof he saw nobody at first. He walked towards the edge and looked out over the city. Suddenly, he felt someone tapping his shoulder.

He turned around and the figure was there. For some reason, Matt couldn't focus in on any part of its body, except its face. And that wasn't much; it was concealed. The only thing he could see was its eyes.

The figure pointed behind him. Matt turned around, and gasped in shock.

The entire city was on fire.

The flames were hot and hungry. They devoured everything in sight, sparing nothing except for the building Matt was standing on.

Across the street was a much taller building. A loud, cracking sound came from it, and it collapsed on itself. On the street below, burning metal and debris fell everywhere. The noise was deafening. It barely missed them.

Matt watched this scene in horror. His body was telling him to run, to get out of there as soon as possible, but his legs were frozen.

Suddenly, from somewhere in the city, there was an ear-splittingly loud roar. A wall of fire appeared, and rushed towards him, incinerating everything in its path.

Matt turned around to run, but ran into the figure behind him, his face colliding with theirs. Somewhere, a man screamed in pain, and then there was blackness.

He woke with a start, gasping, and was greeted by Shade's face. He was standing over Matt, an expression of alarm on his face. It wasn't until Matt caught his breath that he heard the screaming from his dream.

It was coming from outside their window. Shade glanced at the window, and then back to Matt, indicating that this was something he needed to see.

Matt quickly got out of his sleeping bag, grabbed the fire poker, and limped over to the window. As he looked out through the hole between the boards they had put up (which was specifically designed for watching and shooting), his blood ran cold at what he saw.

The morning sun illuminated a terrifying scene of bloodshed. A man was lying in the middle of the street, screaming as a small group of zombies tore into him. He was holding a knife, but seemed unable to summon the strength to use it.

"We have to do something," Matt said. He grabbed his pistol and limped to the door as quickly as he could. He unbarred it (they had put a piece of wood over it to serve as a door bar) and stepped outside, firing a clip into the zombies. The loud noise didn't

matter; the man's screams and blood would have already set off the alarm.

They all dropped to the ground.

Matt hurried over to the man and knelt beside him. He had slick black hair of about medium length, and slightly tan skin. He was wearing a white, blood-soaked t-shirt and tan cargo pants. He was still alive, but not for long. His brown eyes swam with terror. His blood was everywhere, and he had deep, gaping wounds where the zombies had ravaged him. His stomach was open, and his entrails lay strewn around him.

"Help!" the man whispered weakly.

Matt stared in horror. He couldn't move; could barely think. No matter how many times he saw this, it never got easier; especially not when it was so sudden.

"Help!" the man whispered again. His head dropped to the ground, and he died.

"I'm sorry," Matt said. He turned around and vomited.

For a minute, they stood there in a grim silence. And then, Matt noticed them. Walking down the street, on all sides, were zombies. There must have been at least a hundred, easily. And they were all coming towards them.

Matt backed towards the house and drew his M9 Pistol. "Come on," he said. "We need to get back inside."

Inside was not the best place for them now. Unfortunately, it was their only choice. The only other option would be to stay outside, and that would be suicide. At least inside, they had a small amount of protection.

They entered the house as quickly as they could, and barred the door. "Keep watch out back, Shade. Roar if any are coming from behind."

The dragon nodded, and walked towards the back of the house, disappearing from sight.

Matt looked through the hole. The zombies were approaching the house, and were almost to the lawn. There were so many of them! He had never seen this many in one place before.

Matt pulled back the hammer of his pistol, and aimed at the nearest zombie. He waited for a clear shot, and then fired. The window shattered, and the zombie's head exploded in a cloud of blood. It went down, but there were many, many more.

He shot zombie after zombie, but every time one went down, it seemed like two more stepped up to take its place. The far end of the lawn was now stained red, and bodies lay strewn about, but still the zombies kept coming.

Matt was able to keep them back for a few minutes, but every few seconds, they got a little closer. Every time he had to reload, he

wasted precious time, and they got closer. Now they were halfway across the yard, and he could no longer hold them back. Those furthest to his right and left were beginning to leave his field of vision, and once they were gone, they would get in. It would take a while, but they would eventually break through their barricades.

Matt was about to switch to his AK-47. He had wanted to save as much ammo in that as he could, but he was running out of options. At that moment, however, Shade roared.

"Shit!" Matt exclaimed. He gave up on the front; there was no way they could defend it now. The zombies were going to get in, and the only thing they could do now was fight them inside.

He grabbed his backpack and ran to Shade. He looked out the window next to the reptile and saw a sizable group of zombies shambling towards the house. It wasn't nearly as big as the group out front, but it was steadily growing.

"There's nothing we can do to stop it," said Matt. "We have to fall backâ€¦ The stairs might be our only option. If we get pushed up to the second floor, we might still be able to escape. Come on!"

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Lawrence, Ben and Trent were having a much better day.

For starters, they were actually having fun. They were sitting outside of an abandoned restaurant, drinking high-quality, whipped cream-flavored vodka, and shooting zombies across the street. They were having an unofficial "contest" to see who could get the best kills.

Trent raised his gun and shot across the street. The bullet ricocheted off of a stop sign, and hit a zombie right in the head.

"Nice!" Ben observed. He gave Trent a high five. "Now it's my turn."

He raised his gun, and shot at another zombie. The bullet went through its head, out the other side, and into another.

"Two fuckers, one stone," he said

Trent chuckled. "Watch and learn, my friend." He shot again, shooting three zombies in the head.

"Oh yeah?" Ben challenged. "I can beat that right now."

He fired his gun at a second story balcony with a large crate on it. He hit the latch that held the supports of the balcony in place, but it wasn't enough. He shot the other side, and it came lose. The balcony fell forward, and the crate slipped off and landed on a zombie with a sickening crunch. Blood splattered everywhere, and Ben and Trent laughed.

"That was pretty awesome," Trent remarked.

"I can top that, I thinkâ€¦ But it'd mean we'd have to leave," Trent said.

"Oh well, anything better than that I want to see, even if it means this game is over for today," Ben replied.

"Okay," Trent said. He started to take aim, but before he could, Ben interrupted.

"I just noticedâ€¦ There's an awful lot of zombies around here today."

Trent frowned, perplexed. "Yeahâ€¦ You're right. And now that you mention it, they're all heading in the same direction."

It was true; all the zombies seemed to be heading in a southeasterly direction.

"Let's head that way when we leave," Ben suggested. "I kinda wanna see why they're going that way."

"Okay," Trent agreed. "But first, my turn."

He raised his gun and fired at a car. The shot was perfect; it hit the car right in the exhaust pipe, and it exploded with a deafening bang. Fire spewed everywhere, and all the zombie too close to it were killed instantly.

Ben was in hysterics. "That," he said between laughs, "Was amazing."

"Yeah," said Trent. "Now let's get the hell out of here."

But as Ben calmed down, something else popped into his head. "Wait a minute," he said. "Something's not right."

"What do you mean?" Trent asked, feigning ignorance.

"Hold on," Ben replied. He walked over to the car and examined the wreckage. He found the remnants of C4 lying next to it.

"Trent," said Ben, feigning disgust. "You are a lying, cheating prick."

A loud, crunching noise came from the front of the house.

"That sounded like the door," Matt said to Shade, who was squeezed behind him. They were making a stand in the hallway at the bottom of the staircase. "Get ready Shade, they're coming."

Unfortunately, his scaled friend wouldn't be able to help here. He didn't dare risk using his fire in such tight quarters.

About a minute later, the first zombie rounded the corner into the hallway. Matt shot it on sight, but it was immediately replaced by another.

He shot and shot, and zombies kept falling, but more kept coming. The hallway soon became clogged with blood, bodies, and the stench of death. But the zombies were still gaining ground.

Matt decided enough was enough. He put away his pistol and pulled out his AK-47. Without so much as a millisecond of hesitation, he opened fire, and bullets sprayed into the hallway. The walls were painted scarlet, and the mound of bodies on the ground grew higher- but somehow, they still kept coming.

By this time a mound of bodies on the floor had risen to block half of the hallway. The zombies were forced to climb over them, making them easy prey for Matt's bullets. But they would still overrun him eventually; even if he could hold them off, he would run out of ammo at some point. And they might not all be dead when that happened. He didn't want to take the chance.

He shot all of the zombies he could see over the mound, and then lowered his gun. "Come on, Shade," he said urgently. "We need to get upstairs. Let's see if we can get out one of those windows."

Shade backed up the stairs, going slowly, his scales scratching up the walls as he was just barely able to slide past. The hallway was too thin for him, and while he could get through, it was an effort. While he struggled, Matt held off the zombies that were climbing over the mound.

Shade finally made it upstairs and into the bedroom. Matt shot one more zombie, paused to reload the last of his pistol ammo and ran upstairs. The two entered a bedroom. It contained a single bed, a closet, a dresser, and a bookshelf full of dusty, used books. On the other side of the room, there were two windows.

"We've got to hurry," Matt said. "I've only got six shots left in this."

They ran over to the window and looked out. All hopes of an easy escape vanished as they viewed the biggest zombie horde they'd ever seen surrounding.

"We're not getting out of this that easily," Matt predicted.

They met each other's eyes. An unspoken message passed between them, and Matt backed up to the doorway. Shade backed to the other side of the room and crouched. He opened his mouth, and a shot of fire developed in his throat. But before he was able to shoot it, a zombie grabbed Matt from behind.

He let out a startled yell. Shade instinctively swallowed up the shot he was producing and whipped his head back. Matt struggled to keep the zombie's teeth from piercing his neck, and they fell to the ground. Shade roared in a combination of rage and terror.

Matt and the zombie writhed on the floor. Matt rolled over so that he was facing the zombie and pushed its head away, at the same time reaching for his gun. But before he could get it, they rolled over again and the zombie was on top of him. It was then that Shade took his cue. He ran up and brought his claws down on the zombie's back and neck, raking them down the length of its body. Blood squirted from the wounds the dragon inflicted. He bit the zombie in the back and picked him up without any effort at all. With merely a toss of his head, he sent the zombie flying down the hallway. Matt scrambled for his gun and sent three shots at the zombie.

They struck home. The zombie died, and Matt scrambled for his poker, but was greeted by three more zombies. He shot all three of them, and grabbed the poker.

As quickly as he could, he stood up, leaning on the poker. More zombies were making their way up the stairs. Realizing his pistol was now out of ammo, Matt took off his backpack and reached in. He rummaged around and pulled out a hand grenade.

"I was saving this for a special occasion!" he yelled to Shade. "I think this counts!"

He pulled the pin and threw the grenade down the stairs. A few seconds later, an explosion rocked through the house. Zombies were thrown into the air or blown up where they stood. Unfortunately, the ones at the top of the stairs were spared. Matt took out his magnum, braced himself for the recoil, and fired at all of them.

He was prepared this time, and his aim was true. The zombies fell.

Without wasting a single second, he zipped his backpack shut, scooped it up, and ran into the room, slamming the door behind him.

While he was reloading, he said to Shade, "Come on, before they get through the door. Let's get out of here."

Shade faced the window again, and this time he succeeded in shooting a burst of fire at the wall. It exploded outward. Without even giving him a chance to respond, Shade lunged at Matt, scooped him up in his forelegs, and flapped his wings, flying out of the opening. But they didn't make it far. Shade's wing hadn't healed enough, and Matt was weighing him down too much.

They landed in the middle of the street in a patch of road where there were no zombies. Shade let Matt go and he tumbled forward. "Ouch," he said. When he stood up, he quickly followed it with, "Thanks."

Their relief was short-lived, however. On all sides of them, more zombies were closing in.

"Shade, however many shots you have left, now would be a great time to use them," Matt said, struggling to keep from panicking.

Shade raised his head at the house, and fired a shot of flame at it. The side of the house exploded, fire and wood raining on the zombies below, and the floor of the bedroom collapsed.

He fired another shot at the crowd of zombies below the house. They exploded, but there were still a lot of them.

"Don't worry about them, we need to leave!" Matt exclaimed.

Shade turned around, extending his wing slightly to shield Matt from the fire. He kept turning, and firing in different directions, keeping his human pressed against his side so he wouldn't get burned. Some of the zombies were getting awfully close.

After a few more shots, Shade attempted one more, but all that came out was sparks. He was out.

"Watch out, Shade," Matt warned. He opened fire, shooting zombies in every direction. They fell, but just like before, there were so many of them. Matt had never seen so many zombies before.

After a few minutes, his AK-47 ran out of ammo. The zombies were still coming. He pulled out his magnum and started firing that. But he was beginning to realize that they probably wouldn't be able to get out of this alive.

"I think this is the end, Shade," he said, his voice full of regret.

Shade looked at him, and gave a whimper, his gaze full of sadness.

Matt stopped shooting for a moment, and met his eyes. He patted his friend on the snout. "Goodbye, Shade," he said, his voice and eyes dripping with sadness.

Ben and Trent were following the zombies down the streets of Lawrence.

"This is freaking me out," said Trent.

Ben said nothing, but he agreed. He had never seen zombies act like this. Every single one that they saw was being drawn in the same direction.

"Where are they going?" Ben wondered aloud.

Trent shook his head. "I don't know. But something's telling me this is a bad idea."

"You just blew up a car in the middle of a city full of zombies purely for the fun of it," Ben remarked. "This is nothing."

"I guessâ€¦ But still, I don't trust this."

"This doesn't trust you."

"What the hell kind of comeback was that?"

"I dunno."

They kept driving. Eventually, they turned a corner and saw what the zombies were going to.

"Holy hell!" Trent exclaimed.

There were hordes of zombies in the middle of the street, and there were so many that it seemed like all the zombies in the city were gathered in this one spot. To the side, a house was on fire. In the middle, there was a gap in the horde, and a young man was standing there shooting at the zombies. With him was a-

Ben braked, and shut his eyes for a moment, reflecting on what he had just seen. He opened his eyes, and it was still there.

"Holy balls," he breathed. "Trentâ€¦ It might just be the shrooms I had a while agoâ€¦ But I think there's a dragon in front of us. Then again, you look like a hippo, soâ€¦ I could be wrongâ€¦"

In the middle of the street was what appeared to be a living, breathing Night Fury.

"Well I'll be dipped in shit," Trent commented. "So they are real."

"What are you talking about?" Ben asked.

"Do you remember how I told you a couple of weeks ago that some of the experiments escaped from the labs?"

"That's one of them, isn't it?" Ben guessed.

"Yep," said Trent. "And it looks like it's in trouble. What d'ya say we do something about it?"

Ben grinned. "We've got that little contraption you set up last week. Want to finally put it to the test?"

Trent smiled. "Let's do it."

The zombies were almost there, and Matt was out of ammo.

"Here we go, buddy," he said to Shade. "Give it everything you've got." He slashed out with his poker, stabbing and slashing at everything that moved. Shade followed suit with his teeth and claws.

The gap was getting smaller and smaller and the zombies were getting closer and closer. Matt was about ready to give up the little hope he had left, when he heard the sound of machine gun fire.

He looked towards the source of the sound just in time to see the zombies disappear in a wave of blood. They dropped left and right,

When all the zombies in front and to the side were dead, a Dodge Viper pulled up a few yards in front of them. An African-american man of about average height, with short, brown hair, tattoos, and somewhat muscular arms was firing a mounted machine gun that extended from the back of the car. He was wearing a red sweatshirt and blue jeans. In the driver's seat was a man of about eighteen years, Matt's own age. He had short, curly brown hair and pale skin and wore glasses and a grey sweatshirt.

He opened his mouth to say something, than stopped. He recognized them. He saw recognition on the face of the driver as well.

It was Ben.

* * *

><p>Well, what did you think of that? Let me know in the reviews! Just please don't flame. Thanks.

****Anyway, another chapter next Sunday!****

5. Chapter Four: Reunion

****Sorry again for the delay, I had to work most of the day yesterday and it sucked. Anyway, I formatted the next chapter, and here it is! I remember my goal while going into this was to give Shade, a character who didn't have enough personality, more of it. I like to think I succeeded. You tell me if I did or not.****

****Anyway, it's weird for me going back and reading these. It's funny to think how far the story has progressed since I wrote this (about two years and seventy chapters ago). With everything that's happened in the story since this (seriously, where I am right now, the story is about twenty times more complex than it was in these early chapters), and all the characters that have come and gone, it's weird to think that there was once only four of them hanging out in Lawrence. ****

****But anyway, enough reminiscing. You've earned your next chapter.****

*** * ***

<p>Chapter Four

****Reunion****

****Lawrence, Massachusetts****

"Ben," Matt said, dumbfounded.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Ben. "Looks like you're alive after all. I'd ask you what the hell is going on, but truthfully, I'm not sure I want to know."

Shade gave a warning growl. Behind them, the zombies that hadn't been killed were closing in.

"Look," said Trent, whom Matt recognized from his dream. "I can see that you two know each other, but let's save the hugs and kisses for later. Right now, we need to get our asses out of here. The zombies will be flocking to this place even faster now."

Shade grunted in agreement.

"Right," said Matt. "There's one small problem. Shade here won't fit in the car."

Ben thought for a moment. "Well, I assume if he was in any condition to fly, you'd have done so."

"No, he can fly," Matt said sarcastically. "We were just thinking it would be fun to be torn to pieces and eaten."

"So like a masochistic prostitute?"

Matt and Shade stared at him, not even beginning to know how to respond.

"Well, can he at least run?" asked Trent.

Matt looked at Shade, who nodded.

"Yeah, he can run."

"Okay," said Ben. "Our shelter isn't too far from here. Think you can keep up?"

"Yeah, it shouldn't be a problem," Matt replied.

"Okay," Trent remarked. "Let's start now, before those zombies get a chance to grab you."

Matt turned around, and saw the zombies dangerously close to him. He backed up a few paces in fright, and then quickly mounted Shade's back. Shade trotted over to the car.

"We're ready," Matt said.

"Alright, just don't fall behind," Ben instructed. He hit the gas and drove off.

Shade ran behind them. They stayed within three yards of the Viper for as much of the trip as they could. Eventually, they came to an old, abandoned apartment building. Ben pulled the emergency brake, drifted into a parking space, and got out.

Shade stopped next to them, and Matt slid off of his back. He steadied himself with the fire poker.

"Before we go inside, I need to ask something," Ben announced. "What kind of wound is that?" He gestured at Matt's leg.

"Oh, that," Matt chuckled. "Don't worry about that. I wasn't bit; I was shot."

"By who?" Ben asked.

"It's a long story. Maybe one I'll tell you."

"Alright," Ben said, convinced. "But if you start getting sick on me, I'm going to shoot you, okay?"

"Understandable."

"Nothing personal, I just can't take any chances."

Trent walked over to them. "Let's talk inside. We need to get out of the open before we attractâ€¦ unwanted attention."

"Yeah," Ben agreed. "This way."

He led them to a door with the number 69 carved into a spot on the wall next to it where an engraved number had used to hang. He took out a key, unlocked the door, and let them in.

"Will he be able to get in?" Ben asked, pointing to Shade.

"Yeah, he'll be fine. He's had practice doing this. You may get a few cracks in the doorframe, but you'll still have a door."

"Okay," Ben said, and entered the house. Matt and Trent followed, and after about a minute of squeezing later, Shade entered as well.

Ben shut the door, and gave them an official welcome. "Well, this is home. For now. It's not much, but it'll do."

The door opened into a living room. It was dusty, and had two couches and a table in it, as well as a hardwood floor. On the table were a number of battery powered technological devices, including a laptop and a radio transmitter. The apartment also had a kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom.

"Is that how you run your radio station?" Matt asked.

"Yeah," Ben said, surprised. "How'd you know about that?"

"I heard it yesterday."

"It was pretty funny, actually."

"So isn't your face."

"So, Ben," said Trent, changing the subject. "Care to introduce me to your friends?"

"Oh, my bad," said Ben. "Trent, this is Matt, my friend from Before. Matt, this is Trent, my partner in zombie-murdering."

Matt and Trent shook hands. "You're Trent, aren't you?" Matt asked.

"Yep," said Trent. "That's me."

"What gave it away, the eyes or the tattoos?" asked Ben sarcastically.

"That's pretty freaking awesome," said Matt, ignoring Ben's question. "I love your music."

"Thanks," said Trent.

"So, now that you two are acquainted, how about you introduce us to your friend," Ben suggested.

"Alright," Matt replied. "Ben, Trent, this is Shade. Shade, this is Ben and Trent."

Shade smiled in greeting.

"Nice to meet you, Shade," said Trent.

"What he said," said Ben.

"Alright then," said Trent. "Make yourselves at home." He then left the room, saying "I'm going to get something to eat. All that mass-murdering made me hungry."

"Before we do anything, you need new clothes," said Ben. "You can borrow some of mine if you want. They might be a little tight, but it's better than nothing."

Matt looked down at his clothes. They were torn and stained red from the blood of zombies.

"God damn it!" Matt exclaimed. "This was a new sweatshirt!"

"Dude, you've had that since Freshmen Year," Ben recalled. "Are you high or something? Or are you just suffering from shock?"

"No, I had one that looked just like it, but it was a different one. And I'm not high."

"Whatever man. Just go ask Trent for some clothes. I'm way too lazy to do it right now."

Matt punched Ben in the arm and walked after Trent. As he was walking, Ben landed a punch on his back.

"Ow! Dick."

Ben laughed.

Matt left the room, leaving Ben and Shade alone.

Ben stared at Shade. "This is nuts," he said. "So not only do I find out that one of my best friends from Before is still alive, but that he's got a real Night Fury tagging along with him? Did Trent spike my vodka earlier, or something?"

Shade knew that humans didn't believe dragons existed, so he understood Ben's surprise. He shook his head, smirking.

"So you can understand me," Ben said. "I thought so. I wasn't completely sure. So, how did you two meet, anyway?"

Shade thought for a moment. He wanted to answer Ben's question, but he wasn't sure how. Then, an idea came to him.

He laid down on all fours, on a bare patch of hardwood flooring. With his claw, he started carving a picture in the floor.

Ben was surprised by this. He wasn't expecting Shade to be able to draw. It seemed he was underestimating his intelligence.

Matt entered the room while Shade was drawing. "I got some clothes Ben," he said. He saw Shade drawing, and Ben watching, and said, "Looks like the two of you've been bonding."

"I asked Shade how you two met, and he started drawing," Ben explained.

"Yeah, he tends to do that. Since, you know, he can't talk. That, and he likes drawing."

Shade finished his drawing. It was a scene depicting Matt saving him from the zombies.

"So, he saved you from zombies?" Ben asked. "How'd you get attacked by zombies in the first place? Couldn't you have just lit them on fire?"

Shade's ear flaps flattened in mock annoyance. He flicked Ben with his tail.

"What the hell was that for?" Ben asked.

Matt laughed. "Truth is, it's kind of my fault. He saw me as a threat, and was distracted."

"Oh, I see. Douche."

"Hey, if I hadn't done that, he might not be alive right now," Matt explained. "We wouldn't have become partners, and nobody survives on their own. They might be able to for weeks, months, even years, but eventually, they'll make a mistake."

"Whatever, douchebag," Ben retorted.

Matt showed him his middle finger.

Shade was laughing, in his weird, low-pitched dragon-laugh. "What are you laughing at?" Matt asked. "Go back to your drawings."

Shade flicked him with his tail as well.

Trent walked in just then, eating a sandwich. "Well, now that we're all here," he began, "We owe each other stories. But first, some music." He pressed a button on the laptop, and the catchy verses of Green Day's "East Jesus Nowhere" filled the room. Shade started tapping his claw to the beat.

"It's been too long," said Ben. "Where the hell have you been this whole time?"

"Wellâ€¦ I was in Colorado on Z-Day. I stayed there for two months afterwards, and then made my way back home," Matt explained. "Me and Shade met in Missouri. We would've been here sooner, but he had an accident while he was flying. It tore his wing pretty badly. The external damage is healed for the most part, but it's still all screwed up inside; he can't fly with any weight for very long."

"How the hell did he crash that badly?" asked Trent.

"Wellâ€¦ He's a bit of a daredevil, to be honest. When we fly, he occasionally does some insanely reckless stunt. And one of those times, it didn't go over well."

"Ouch," said Ben.

Shade extended his left wing, revealing a faint scar that came from the result of the crash. It ran all the way down his wing, and branched off into smaller scars.

"Holy shit," said Trent. "God damn, that must've hurt."

"Yeah, and I was riding on him at the time. It would've killed me, but he absorbed enough of the blow."

Shade glared at him.

"Well it's true!"

Ben and Trent laughed.

"So, what have you been doing?" asked Matt.

"Well, I've been wandering, you know, doing this and that," Ben replied. "I killed zombies a lot."

"I, on the other hand, have actually been trying to accomplish something," said Trent.

"And what would that be?" asked Matt.

"Well," Trent began. "What if I told you I was getting close to potentially discovering a way to wipe the zombies off the face of the Earth?"

Shade's ears pricked up in interest.

"Areâ€¦| Are you really?" Matt asked.

"Well, I'm not sure if it'll be there, but I found evidence pointing to somewhere in New Hampshire that may or may not have a way to do that," Trent explained. "And, seeing as I've got nothing better to do, I decided I'd check it out. I met Ben in Chicago, where I also found that information. He decided to tag along."

"Which brings us to today, and the big question," Ben stated. "What were you doing today? How the fuck did you attract so many zombies?"

"I have no idea," Matt replied. "I mean, there was bound to be some. I accidentally shot myself yesterdayâ€¦|" he gestured to his bullet wound, and Ben laughed. "Shut up," Matt retorted. "Anyway, I left a trail of fresh blood. And this morning, I shot a couple of zombies who were eating some poor fellow alive. That was going to attract a good-sized horde, but thatâ€¦|" Matt trailed off, trying to find the words in his head. "That was the biggest horde I've ever seen."

Trent shook his head in confusion. "Every single zombie we saw was heading in your direction," he recalled. "It's like they were acting as a group. I've never, ever seen them act that way before."

"The question is why were they acting like that?" Ben asked.

"I don't know," Trent replied. "But it's very disturbing."

The mood in the room suddenly turned very grim. Even Ben had a sullen look on his face.

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it now," said Matt. "Let's have some good times, while we still can."

"What do you mean, while we still can?" Ben asked. "Can you see the future or something?"

"No, I'm just saying," Matt replied. "What if we all die tomorrow? It's possible! I mean, the world might even be over everywhere!"

Ben shrugged. "You have a point there."

"What do you guys know about the rest of the world anyway?" Matt asked.

"I heard rumors," said Ben. "Some of the last news we got before New Hampshire was overrun was that the pathogen crossed the ocean. That, combined with the fact that we haven't even seen any evidence of an outside world- not even a plane crossing over the country- makes me think that they're gone for good."

"Wowâ€|" said Matt. "That sucks. A lot."

"Yeahâ€|"

Matt changed the subject. "So, what brings you guys here?" he thought he knew, but wanted to hear it from them.

"Well, Ben and I are going to New Hampshire," Trent replied. "You're welcome to join us if you want to. Both of you."

"I'd love to," Matt replied. "On the condition that we stop in Harristown, Norbury, Gunnerville, and Lyndrich."

"What's there?" asked Trent.

"Home," said Matt. "I want to go home one last time. It's where I've been heading since the beginning. And I want to see if anyone else is alive."

"Why not?" Ben replied.

"Sounds good to me," said Trent.

"What do you think, Shade?" Matt asked.

Shade shrugged. He was starting to space out; he was tracing random lines in the floor with his claw, while tapping another one to the music, which had changed to "Diamond Eyes" by Shinedown.

"I love this song," Matt commented.

"Yeah," Ben agreed. "Remember when we went to see these guys live?"

"That was possibly one of the funnest concert experiences of my life," Matt remembered.

"Yeahâ€|" Ben agreed.

"Hey, I'm feeling left out here," Trent joked.

"Sorry," Matt chuckled. "We saw you too, remember."

"So," Ben changed the subject. "What's your Z-Day story?"

Matt preferred not to think about Z-Day. He had seen some horrible things. His family, the bloodshed, and-

You shouldn't dwell on that, his mind told him. _It's done; there's nothing you can do now._

"I don't really want to talk about it," Matt said, sullenly.

"Okay," said Ben.

"You can share your story if you want, though."

"Well," Ben dug through his memory. "It happened really fast. It started in school; everything was normal. Then, out of nowhere, we had a lockdown. I assumed it was just another drill, but it wasn't. I was in engineering at the time, and some crazy person- we later found out it was a zombie- started trying to break through the window. People started screaming, not just in our class but everywhere. Before we knew it, zombies broke through the door and started attacking us." Ben broke off here. The next few memories were rather painful ones. "Theyâ€| they ripped the teacher apart right in front of us, and several classmates too. Me and a couple of others started throwing chairs and shit at them. We tried to escape, but I was the only one who made it.

"I have no idea who else survived, or where they went. I was with Anthony for a bit but he disappeared. I went home, but found my family dead. So I went to one of those shelters for a while, trying to find out if any of our friends were alive. I never heard from one of them. When New Hampshire finally fell- which wasn't for a while; we were one of the last to fall- I stayed for a couple weeks, trying to find someone. I couldn't find anyone. So I left.

"While I was in the shelter, they blocked off New Hampshire from all the other states. And they did it very well. It was a pain in the ass to get out, but I eventually did."

As Matt was listening to this, something popped into his head. He remembered that before Z-Day, Ben had had a girlfriend; Katie. _Where is she now?_ He asked. _Is she dead?_

"What happened to Katie?" he asked.

Ben's face immediately turned even bleaker. He looked to the ground, and said, "Sheâ€| She died. I don't really like to talk about it."

There was silence for a bit. Trent eventually broke it. "That was a horrible day. All of us lost most of what was dear to them. Me, they took all of my friends. They killed my wife and my daughter. Even my band mates were massacred. Not a day goes by where it doesn't hurt. But I've learned to move on." His eyes started to water.

"I'm sorry," Matt said. He meant it.

"It's okay," said Trent, blinking back the tears. "I'm not the only one. And besides; as long as I'm alive, and still looking for a cure, then they haven't died in vain."

About an hour later, they were back out. While canned goods were

okay, some of the best survival food came from fresh meat, and they needed more of that. For Ben and Trent, it would be a particularly interesting trip. They were about to see how dragons hunted.

Matt, Ben, and Trent kept several yards back. Shade led the way, sniffing, searching for prey. The dragon wasn't sure what to think about the newcomers. His first instinct was distrust; he didn't trust strange humans. But Matt trusted them, and Shade trusted Matt, and even though he didn't trust him as far as he could throw them- which actually wasn't saying much, since he could probably throw them very far- they weren't that bad.

He focused on the task at hand. It was getting harder to hunt; prey was becoming more and more scarce. He didn't know whether it was the zombies or the impending winter, but it was happening all the same.

And those idiots back there aren't helping, he thought, annoyed. Behind him, the three humans were making a lot of noise, talking and laughing. He turned his head back, let out a short, yet loud growl and snapped his tail. They got the message, and shut up.

This would be so much easier if I could fly. He missed flying, and longed to be able to spread his wings and take to the sky again. Looking back, what he had done was stupid. _No_, he corrected himself. _It was completely idiotic. What was I thinking?_ But he hadn't _been_ thinking; that was the problem. He enjoyed doing stunts in the air; it was a rare moment of fun in a bleak world. But that last one had crossed a line.

He caught a scent. It was a deer. It was far off, but it was definitely there. Hopefully it was alive.

He crouched in his stalking position and crept forward. From the smell of it, his prey was beyond the hill that lay up ahead. If he moved any faster, he would startle it.

"So, what exactly did he do, anyway?" Trent asked behind him.

"What do you mean?" Matt asked.

"How did he get that scar?"

Oh you've got to be kidding me.

"I told you; he did a stupid stunt."

"What did he do, flip a few times too close to the ground?" Ben asked.

"Noâ€¦ He kindaâ€¦ Tried to fly through a barnâ€¦ Upside downâ€¦"

Ben and Trent roared with laughter.

"Come on guys, it's not that funny! I was almost killed! And it ripped his wing almost clean off!" Matt protested.

"Come on, you know it's funny," said Ben.

Okay, that's it.

Shade turned around and shot a bolt of fire only a yard in front of them. They jumped back, startled. He glared at them, and then continued.

"I think he wants us to shut up," Ben whispered.

"No shit, Sherlock," Matt replied.

They shut up after that. Shade was starting to get angry, but he remained calm. The deer was still there. He could smell it. Once he got to the top of the hill, he could go for it. If those idiots kept quiet, that is.

He reached the top of the hill. On the other side was a field, and standing in the middle was not one but two deer. A buck and a doe. They were scrawny, but they would do. He crouched at the top of the hill, watching. They didn't notice him. He motioned with his tail for the three humans to come. They quickly- but quietly, thank God- covered the distance between them and stood by his side. Ben tried to move forward a little, but Shade pressed his tail against his chest, warning him to stay back.

He slowly took a few more paces forward, and then decided he was close enough. He jumped forward and flapped his wings a few times.

In a matter of seconds, he crossed the distance from the hill to the buck and landed on it, forcing it to the ground headfirst and snapping its neck. The doe tried to run, but Shade was faster. He caught up to it in seconds, and killed it with a swift bite to the neck.

He collected his prey in his mouth, and trotted back to meet the humans. He placed it on the ground in front of them, and sat back on his hind legs.

"That was pretty awesome," said Ben.

"Thanks," said Shade, although all the humans could hear was a short warble.

Sometimes he wished they could understand him.

They loaded the dead deer into the trunk of Ben's Viper. When they were done, they bent over to wipe the blood of the deer off of their hands onto the grass.

"That's just lovely," said Trent

"Yeah," said Ben. He looked down and saw a bloodstain on his shirt.
"Oh what the hell!"

Matt and Trent started laughing.

"Hey, Matt, next time we go hunting, tell Puff the Magic Dragon over here to make less of a mess."

Before he could say another word, Shade tackled him. "What the

fuck?!" he yelled, startled. He squirmed out of Shade's grip, and started running, but Shade out sped him and tackled him again.

It continued like this for some time. Matt and Trent stood on the sidelines, laughing their asses off.

"Do you think we should help him?" asked Trent.

"Nah, Shade's just goofing around. Besides, this is hilarious," Matt replied.

"Alright. Hey, just out of curiosity, does Shade know that he wasâ€¦ You knowâ€¦ Genetically engineered?"

Matt frowned. "I honestly don't know. I never brought it up because I didn't want to cause him painâ€¦ I'm not sure if he would react negatively, but I don't want to take the chance, you know?"

Trent shook his head. "You know you're going to have to tell him at some point, right?"

"Yeah," said Matt. "I'm not looking forward to it."

A few minutes later, Shade got bored and let Ben go. "What the hell?!" he yelled. "Why didn't you guys help?"

"Because we were busy," Trent replied.

"Busy doing what, laughing?"

"Maybe."

"Asses!" Ben gave them both the finger.

Late that night, the four of them were sitting around a fire inside the apartment, eating roasted deer, drinking beer (except Matt and Shade, who settled for water), and listening to "A Prophecy" by Asking Alexandria.

"You know what I would love to do again, just one more time?" Matt asked.

"What?" asked Ben, who was drunk.

"I would want to go see a concert, one more time," Matt answered.

"I wish I could play at a concert," Trent added.

"We went to one of your concerts once."

"Yeah, Ben told me."

"Hell yeah I did," said Ben. "Hold on a minute, I have to take a piss." He got out and stumbled out of the room.

Trent leaned over and looked through the door. "Ben! That's the sink, not the toilet! And shut the damn door!"

"Shit, sorry 'bout that!" Ben called back.

Matt looked at Shade. "You see Shade? This is why alcohol is bad." He took a sip of his beer.

Shade stared at him, his expression one of smug disapproval.

"What? I'm a hypocrite. Sue me."

Ben came stumbling back in. He tried to sit down, but tripped and landed on Shade. "Sorry!" he yelled.

Shade shook him off and he landed on the floor.

"Ow!" he yelled.

"Ben, how much have you had to drink?" Matt asked.

"A whole shitload!" Ben exclaimed.

"Jesus Christ!" Trent exclaimed. "I didn't even think we _had _that much!"

"...Okayâ€|"

There was an awkward silence. "Hehe, awkward silence," said Ben giddily.

"Ben, you need to go to bed," said Trent. "And I do too. I'm exhausted."

"What's bed?" Ben asked.

Trent poured a bottle of water over the fire, extinguishing it. Then, he turned the music off.

"Ahhhhhhh, fucker."

"Love you too," Trent replied. "Hey, Matt. For some reason, there's no mattress on the bed in the bedroom, so do you want the couch? I'll sleep on the floor if you want."

"No, it's fine," Matt replied.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"Okay." Trent pulled a sleeping bag out from next to one of the couches and unrolled it. He then got inside.

Ben flopped onto the other couch. "Goodnight everyâ€| oneâ€|" He fell asleep into a drunken slumber.

Matt went into his backpack, which he had stored under the table earlier. He pulled out his sleeping bag and unrolled it on the floor. He got into it, and Shade curled up next to him, letting his wing drape over him.

"Goodnight Trent," he said.

"Goodnight," Trent replied. "Tomorrow, we're going to New

Hampshire."

"Sweet." A feeling of excitement bloomed in his chest. "Goodnight Ben."

No response.

"Goodnight Shade."

Shade let out a tired grunt.

Matt lay there in the dark, his thoughts wandering, thinking about the day, and about what would happen the next day. Eventually, sleep came, and he dreamed into the night.

* * *

><p>So, let me know what you think! Next Sunday, they're going to New Hampshire!

6. Chapter Five: The Wall

So, a fair bit of warning, this chapter gets rather ridiculous. I do think it's a lot of fun, though. Anyway, I hope you like it!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.

* * *

><p>Chapter Five

The Wall

Haverhill, Massachusetts

The two vehicles sped through the empty, ruined streets of Haverhill. In front were Ben and Trent in their Viper, blasting Green Day's "Armatage Shanks" as loud as humanly possible. Behind them, in a large, silver Ford 4X4 that they had hotwired were Matt and Shade. Matt was driving, while Shade was riding in the bed with the window separating them left open.

Matt was tapping his fingers on the wheel to "The Judas Kiss" by Metallica, and thinking back to the conversation that had occurred earlier that morning. Matt had been able to replenish his ammo from Ben and Trent's store, and they had talked about how they would get into New Hampshire.

The defenses protecting New Hampshire were better than most states. Not only had New Hampshire been one of the last states to fall, but the government had seemed to take special interest in protecting it. Trent saw this as further evidence that what he was looking for was in New Hampshire.

After doing some research, Trent found some information on the wall in the flash drive he had recovered from Chicago. Most states hadn't been able to build a wall. Those that had built crude, easily penetrable barriers. Only a select few had built a wall like New

Hampshire's; D.C. and Pennsylvania were the only others. Every architect and construction worker in New Hampshire- and many in Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, and even Canada- that had survived Z-Day had been commissioned to build the wall. The blueprints had been created at some time before Z-Day, possibly due to the pathogen's very existence. For a three week job, it was extremely well-built. And several traps, in the event of a breach, had been built on the inside. Not all of them were electronically powered, and those that were could hold a charge for years.

Unfortunately, that was the route they would have to take. The outside of the wall had been made impossible to scale, and Shade was in no condition to fly over it.

The flash drive said nothing about what traps they would have to face, and while the wall wasn't much thicker than the average school hallway, the path from one door to the other was long. They would have to be extremely careful.

Ahead of them, Trent- who wasn't trusting Ben with the wheel- was pulling over at a gas station. Matt followed them; he pulled to a stop, killed the engine, and got out of the car. Shade hopped out of the back and followed him.

"What's up?" He asked Ben, who was keeping watch.

"My head hurts, and Trent needs gas," Ben replied.

"Well that's your own fault. And alright, I should probably get some too."

"Okay, I'll keep watch here. Not that I have a choice."

"Okay." Matt walked over to the pumps, where Trent was syphoning fuel. Matt bent over to do the same

"Why are we getting gas anyway?" Matt asked. "We can't get the cars through the wall."

"Shhh!" Trent exclaimed. "Don't remind Ben! He's suffering enough as is."

"What do you mean?"

"He loves that car like it's his child. And if you must know, I was thinking the same thing earlier, but the wall is on the complete other side of the city, and we're about to run out. There's no guarantee that we'll get past the wall alive, and if I'm going to die today, I'd like to have as much luxury as possible beforehand."

"Alright," said Matt. "And if the need arises, fuller gas tanks explode better."

Trent grinned at him. "Exactly."

Ben, overhearing the conversation, yelled "You're not blowing up _my_ car, bitches!"

He got the generator hooked up and began filling a container with

gas. When he was done, Matt followed suit. When the cars were all fueled up, they got back in, and drove off.

The wall was like nothing Matt had ever seen.

It was three stories tall, and stretched on as far as Matt could see. The sides were as smooth as glass, yet as hard as steel. They wouldn't be getting through easily.

"Alright," said Matt, breaking the ice. "Are we all ready?"

"Hold on a minute," said Ben. "I need a moment to say goodbye."

"Oh give me a break," Matt muttered under his breath.

"It's all good," said Trent. "Go ahead."

Shade rolled his eyes.

Ben walked over to his car and hugged the front. Or, at least, he attempted to. "Bye," he said. "I'll miss you."

After a minute of this, Trent said, "Time to go."

"No, wait a minute," Ben protested.

"No, come on," said Trent, prying Ben away from the Viper.

Ben resisted at first, but eventually gave in. Trent led him to the wall, and Matt and Shade followed.

"There should be a door around here somewhere," he said.

Shade walked over to a certain spot in the wall and sniffed it. He looked up and gestured with his head towards the spot.

"Looks like he found it," Matt observed. They walked over to Shade and saw the door.

"Thanks," said Trent. He patted Shade on the head.

"Yeah, but there's one small problem," said Matt. "How the hell are we going to open it?"

There was no handle on the door. Instead, there was an electronic lock with a keypad to the side.

"The power's out," said Ben. "So that means it's unlocked. We just need to get it ajar somehow. But that thing's in there pretty tight."

"Hmmm," said Matt. "That's a- hey, what the hell?!"

Shade had bitten the collar of his shirt and picked him up. He carried him a few yards away and set him back down.

"What the hell was that for?" Matt protested. He attempted to walk back over to the door, but Shade blocked him with his tail. Matt realized that Shade wanted him to keep back. He turned around and flicked his tail for the others to do the same.

Ben and Trent walked over and waited, wondering what Shade was going to do.

He shot a bolt of fire at the door, and the resulting impact did absolutely nothing in terms of damage. It merely left a giant black smear. But, it did something else; the resulting impact jarred the door open slightly.

"Sweet," said Ben. The three of them ran over to the door, and pried it open. It was difficult, but with their combined strength they were able to accomplish the task. They could see nothing inside but blackness.

"Anyone got a flashlight?" Matt asked. Trent pulled one out and switched it on, shining it through the door.

The wall was more than big enough for Shade to fit into. Trent picked up a rock and threw it in, testing for any traps. Nothing happened.

The three of them stepped inside. Behind them, Shade squeezed through the door (which was much thinner than the actual wall) grunting in annoyance.

"So, what now?" asked Ben.

"Now, we move forward. Being very careful, that is," Trent replied.

To their right was nothing but a wall. To their left was a hallway that stretched into blackness.

Trent shut the door behind them, and the only source of light was the flashlight. Everything else was pitch black.

"Well," he said. "Who's going first?"

Shade took the lead. He could take a hit far better than any of them, and was more alert to danger. The rest of them stayed several paces behind, walking silently.

It was Ben who broke the silence. "They built this thing in three weeks?" he asked, incredulous.

"They were literally working twenty-four hours a day," said Trent. They really didn't want anything getting through this. Even now, seven months later, with no living person to guard it, it will still do its job if we're not careful."

"Why here?" Ben asked. "Why New Hampshire?"

"There's obviously something here they wanted to protect," Trent replied. "And this would be one of the last states you'd expect."

After a few more moments of silence, Matt, who was keeping a firm grip on his pistol, said, "This place creeps me out. How far have we walked, anyway?"

"A mile, maybe," said Trent.

"Do you have any idea when we'll find the way out?" Matt asked.

"Well, if I'm not mistaken, there should be another wall on the other side. Once we get there, there'll be a door somewhere. That's all the flash drive said about it; I have no idea how much further it is. And there are still the traps to get through."

"We've been walking for a while, and there have been no traps," said Ben. "Are you sure they're here?"

"Oh, they're here all right. Give it time."

"I don't wanna give it time."

"Too bad."

Suddenly, Shade stopped up ahead. He growled at them to stay put, opening his wings slightly at the same time. He inched his head forward a little bit, sniffing.

"I think we found them," said Trent. "God help us."

Shade took a step forward. When his paw touched the floor, a panel of it sank in rapidly, and two short tubes stuck out of the wall.

Matt had just enough time to yell, "Shade! Get back!" before flames shot out of the tubes. Shade was completely engulfed.

"No! Shade!" Trent yelled.

"GOD DAMN IT! MY HEAD!" Ben screamed, clutching his head in agony.

Matt could only stand there watching. His heart pounded as he waited nervously for the flames to clear. It seemed like hours, but in reality it couldn't have been more than thirty seconds before they finally did.

Shade was perfectly fine. A little shaken up, but otherwise fine. The tubes retreated into the wall.

"What the-" said Ben. "How the hell did he survive that?"

"He's a dragon," said Matt. "He's impervious to fire. On the outside, anyway."

Shade spat a spark out of his mouth, and took another step forward. The floor panels sunk in again, and the fire returned.

"Well, that's just great!" Ben yelled.

"Peachy," Trent agreed.

"I'm getting the feeling there's more where that came from, too," said Matt.

The fire cleared up again, and Shade continued walking across the

floor. Each step he took over the course of five steps generated more fire. After that, it was safe again. Or so it seemed.

Shade kept going. "Shade! What are you doing?" Matt yelled after him.

He looked back, and gestured onward with his head.

"I think he's scouting ahead for us," said Trent.

"Be careful!" Matt yelled.

Shade flicked his tail in acknowledgement.

Suddenly, there was a clicking noise. Shade paused for just a moment, then took off at full speed. Right where he had just been, several turrets came out of the wall and fired, not really aiming at anything. The bullets seemed to be going everywhere. Shade was just fast enough to avoid them, but had he waited one more second, he probably would've been killed. After a few seconds, the turrets disappeared, but Shade's troubles had just begun.

A laser appeared, slicing up and down from floor to ceiling at an alarmingly fast rate. One had merely seconds to pass through it before they would be chopped in half. Shade, being the large Night Fury he was, had even less time.

He stood there, waiting, deciding when it was time to make a move. Matt realized he was holding his breath. "Come on," he urged Shade, quietly. "Come on, you can make it."

Shade made his move. He jumped through the laser and landed on the other side. He let out a roar of pain; the laser had cut him. But he didn't stop; couldn't stop. As soon as he got past the lasers, a giant blade fell from one of the walls, slicing down. He had only a second to make it through, but he did. After that, he disappeared from sight.

They could still hear the sounds. A loud, electric buzzing sound echoed down the pathway, and then the sound of metal grating against metal, followed by a loud thwang. Finally, there was another, louder grating and a shriek of terror. They heard loud, scratching noises, and then silence.

"Shade!" Matt called. "Shade, are you okay?"

For a while, there was no reply. "Shade," Matt said, quietly this time, fearing the worst.

"Mattâ€¦" said Trent. "I'm sorry, but-"

He was cut off by a roar in the distance. It was Shade, and it was not a roar of pain, or terror, but of triumph, followed by an explosion of fire some ways down the hallway.

Matt let out a sigh of relief, followed by a chuckle. "He made it."

"Jesus Christ," said Trent.

"_He_ made it," said Ben. "But what about us?"

Matt remembered that it was now their turn and his blood ran cold. _We're next_, he thought.

Next to him, Trent was rummaging through his backpack. He pulled out two more flashlights. "Take these," he said, handing them to Matt and Ben. "I'm taking this one with me, and I don't want you to be left in the dark. You'd probably die. I'm not sure the extent of what I'm about to face, but I have an idea, and if I survive, I'll tell you."

"Good luck, man," said Ben. "I'll see you on the other side, hopefully."

Trent reached into his pocket and pulled out the flash drive to give to Ben. "Just in case I don't make it, take this. Finish the job for me."

"Okay," said Ben.

Trent nodded, and waved. "See you later." He ran into the trap, and disappeared from sight behind a wave of fire.

After a few seconds, he yelled, "Holy shit! That was messed up!" When the fire cleared away, they saw him standing beyond it, unhurt. "There's a small safe area here! After this, it's all traps!"

He ran as fast as he could through the turrets. One of the bullets almost hit him, but he made it through unscathed. Then, there was the laser. He dived through it without even hesitating, and landed on his stomach. He crawled under the giant blade, and disappeared from sight, with nothing but a beam of light to acknowledge he was still there.

The sounds that they had heard earlier came again. After the loud grating noise, they heard Trent yell in fright, and the light disappeared. Immediately after, they heard a loud roard and a flap of wings.

"Trent!" Ben yelled. "What happened?"

There was silence for a moment. Then, from the blackness, Trent yelled, "Shade just saved my life, that's what happened! I lost my flashlight though! Try not to do that! Who's next?"

Ben stepped back. "You first," he said.

Matt punched him in the arm. "Ass," he said. "I'm coming, Trent!"

"Alright!" Trent replied. "After the blade, where Shade disappeared from sight, there are three more traps! The first is several large saw blades rising from the floor! They're easy, but don't let your guard down! They can still kill you! Just jump over them!"

"Okay!" Matt replied. "What's after that?"

Very faintly, he heard Trent talking to Shade. After a few moments, he replied, "Well, there's a bunch of spears that fall from the

ceiling! All you need to do is run as fast as you can, but then it gets tricky! The third trap is immediately after it, and that's the one that almost killed me! If it wasn't for Shade, it would've!

"The floor in front of you will open up, and there will be a pit of spikes! If you stay, the spears will get you! If you keep running, you'll fall, and I don't know if Shade can pull another rescue like that, what with his wing and all! So you'll have to jump as far as you can! Shade should be able to catch you- it's not too big, just big enough so that an average human won't be able to reach the other side in time to catch it!"

"How do you know he'll be able to catch me?" Matt asked.

"I don't! Not for sure, anyway! But you trust him, don't you?"

Matt thought about it. "Yeah! I trust Shade with my life!"

"Well then I wouldn't worry about it too much!"

Matt took a few moments to gather his wits. When he was ready, he yelled, "Okay! I'm coming!"

He started running. Overnight, the pain from his gunshot wound had diminished a little. But he was still limping, and the poker made it a bit harder to be agile. Waves of pain rose from his leg, but he ignored them. He could feel the floor panels sinking beneath his feet, and could feel the heat from the fire right behind him, searing his back, and his neck. And then, he was through. He stopped for a moment to catch his breath.

"I made it past the fire!" he yelled.

"You're doing great so far!" Trent encouraged.

"You know, I would say that you just went out of the frying pan and into the fire, but I think that's actually the opposite of what just happened!" Ben yelled.

Matt stood there for a moment, readying himself for the real thing. When he was ready, and the pain from his leg had slightly retreated, he took off running.

The clicking noise appeared, but he kept running. The turrets appeared and shot their bullets, but Matt evaded them, although they came frighteningly close. He kept running. The laser appeared, and Matt dove under it, earning a sharp pang of agony from his leg. He slid past it and under the blade that came swinging down, coming within centimeters of his backpack. Holding on to his flashlight, he quickly got to his feet and continued.

The saw blades were next. They started from the wall and made their way towards the center. Matt jumped over them, barely missing them, but missing them all the same. When he landed, his leg almost gave in, and he stumbled, but he gritted his teeth, ignored the pain, and kept running.

The light from his flashlight revealed Trent's face, and glinted off of Shade's black scales and green eyes, several yards ahead of him. Matt kept running. The spears came down from the ceiling and smashed

into the floor right behind him. Almost as soon as this happened, the floor in front of him started separating. In the beam of the flashlight, he barely had time to process the glint of spikes in the pit below, and the image of Shade readying himself to catch him, before he jumped.

He screamed. The pit below grew wider, and while he was hanging midair, it stopped. He was flying over it; for a second it looked like he would reach the other side, but then he fell. He braced himself for an impact, but just before he hit fell into the pit, he felt teeth clench his backpack and pull him up. Shade set him down on the floor next to Trent.

Matt knelt down, gasping for breath, and waiting for the pain from his leg to subside. When it did, he stood up, and hugged Shade's neck, rubbing his smooth black scales. "Thank you," he said.

But it wasn't quite over yet. Ben still had to cross.

"Ben! Matt made it! It's your turn!" Trent yelled.

"Oh, yay!" Ben replied sarcastically. "There's nothing like running Jigsaw's favorite obstacle course!"

"Did you hear what I said to Matt, or do you need me to repeat it?" Trent asked.

"Nah, I'm good! Shade, you better catch me, or I swear-"

"What're you gonna do?" Matt asked. "Bleed on him?"

Silence for a moment. Then, "Shut up!"

Matt laughed.

"You coming, Ben?" Trent asked.

"Yeah, hold on one second!" A few moments of silence. "I'm coming now!"

"Okay! You better not lose that flash drive!"

"I won't!" Ben yelled.

A few seconds later, the fire started.

Matt waited nervously. When the fire stopped, Ben yelled, "This is such a bad idea!"

"No shit!" Matt yelled. "Do you think we're doing this because we have a choice?"

"I didn't sign up for this shit," Ben muttered.

"Why are you so surprised?" Matt asked. "Didn't you already come through here?"

"I didn't go through the wall!" Ben replied. "I took an airplane and flew over it!"

Matt looked at Trent. "Is he serious?"

"I think so," Trent replied.

"Why didn't we just do that?" Matt asked.

"Where are we going to get an airplane?"

"Boston!"

"Ohâ€¦ right," said Trent. "Oh well. Too late now. Ben! Are you coming or what?" he yelled.

"Yeah! Just a second!"

"Hurry up please! I'd like to get out of here as soon as possible!" Matt yelled.

"Alright! I'm coming!"

"Get ready Shade," said Matt.

Shade readied himself as Ben started running.

Ben made it through the turrets, the laser, and the blade. He entered the beam of Matt's flashlight, and the saw blades appeared. He jumped, but slightly too low. The saw blade nicked his shoe, cutting his foot, and he fell to the ground.

"Shit!" Trent and Ben yelled in unison.

Ben started crawling as fast as he could. The spears came down, and they struck on either side of his foot, as the floor started opening.

"Oh fuck me!" Ben yelled.

The floor opened all the way, and he fell in. Anticipating this, he flipped himself over and grabbed the top of the pit, holding on, but dropping his flashlight.

"Shit!" he yelled in terror. "Help me!"

Shade glanced at Matt, making eye contact. His eyes darted from Matt to his hind leg, and back, and then he looked away. He started to ease himself out over the pit.

Matt understood what he wanted. He grabbed on to Shade's hind leg, keeping him from losing his balance. "Trent! Hold his other leg!"

Trent ran to the other side and held onto Shade's other leg. Shade eased himself out, and then leaned forward. When his hind legs were on the edge, and his front legs were forced between them, he lunged for Ben.

Matt almost lost his grip on Shade's leg, but managed to hold on. Shade attempted to grab Ben's backpack, but missed. He fell into the pit, roaring, and Trent and Matt held on for both their lives and Shade's.

"Ben!" Matt yelled. "Reach for him!"

Shade pushed against the wall of the pit, and swung upward towards Ben again. He tried to grab his backpack, but missed again.

"Ben!" Trent yelled. "God damn it, reach for him!"

Ben was too frightened to reply. He managed to nod, however.

Shade swung for Ben again. This time, Ben was prepared, and swung one of his arms to meet Shade's. He grabbed the dragon's paw, and Shade grabbed him as much as a dragon could grab something. The two of them almost formed a bridge across the pit.

"Now what?" Ben asked, his voice shaking with fear.

"Let go, and hold on for dear life!" Matt yelled.

"Are you crazy?" Ben yelled.

"Probably! But you have to trust us!"

Ben hesitated for a moment, thinking. Then he said, "Shade, you better hold on to me, or I will haunt you for the rest of your life!"

The Night Fury nodded.

Ben braced himself, then let go of the side.

Shade fell back into the pit, this time taking Ben with him. Ben held onto his leg with both arms, screaming. He smashed into the wall, but managed to hold on.

"Ow," he said. He looked down. "Oh God, get me out of here please! I'm way too close to these spikes!"

"Okay!" Matt yelled. "Use his spines and climb up his back!"

Ben reached up with one of his arms and grabbed onto Shade's ear flaps. He pulled himself up and grabbed one of the dragon's spines. Shade grunted in pain, but endured it.

Ben continued pulling himself up. Eventually, he made it to the top of the pit and jumped onto the ground next to Matt.

"Alright Shade," said Matt. "We're gonna pull you up now. Ben, grab his tail and pull."

The three of them pulled, and Shade attempted to push against the wall of the pit to help them. "Shade, you need to lose a few pounds," Trent grunted.

Shade ignored him and continued to push himself up. When he was close enough to the top, he pushed with his front legs and climbed back over the top of the pit. Matt, Ben, and Trent let go, and collapsed to the ground, catching their breath.

"Well, we made it," Matt commented.

"Shade, I think you're my new best friend," said Ben.
"Thanks."

Shade let out a warble, which Matt assumed to mean, "You're welcome." He sat down and started washing off Ben's blood, which had dripped from the cut in his foot onto him.

"Ben, you're cut," said Matt. "You okay?"

"I think so," said Ben. He took off his shoe. "That shoe's destroyed, but the cut's nothing but a scratch."

"Shade, what about you?"

Shade looked at him questioningly. Then he remembered, and looked at his tail. Matt examined it, and saw a slight, charred cut from the laser. It wasn't really anything major, but it did look painful.

"We'll take care of that when we get out of here, okay?"

Shade nodded. He was just grateful that nobody had died.

"Why is all this here, anyway?" Matt asked. "Why didn't they just not put doors in?"

"They wanted people to be able to get through," said Trent. "But only the people they wanted. If there was still electricity, putting the right combination into the keypad would not only unlock the door, but disengage the traps as well. It wasn't until New Hampshire fell that the electricity was cut off completely, and rendered it impossible for anyone to get through without running into these."

"At this point, I don't care anymore," said Ben. "I just want to get out. Are there any more traps?"

"I don't know," said Trent. "Guess there's only one way to find out."

Ben groaned. "God damn it," he said.

Shade took the lead again. The others walked in silence behind him.

After they walked another mile or so, Shade stopped. He let out a warning growl.

"Oh you've got to be kidding me," Matt complained.

"Wait a minute," said Trent. "Shine your light as far down the hallway as you can."

Matt shined the light further, and what they saw instantly brightened the mood.

It was a wall.

"Are we finally at the end?" Ben asked. "I've had it with this place, I need out!"

"Wait," said Matt. "Something's not right."

Shade was tense. He was staring at the floor, his ears were flattened against his head, and his normally large black pupils had narrowed to slits. "What's wrong?" Matt asked.

Shade nudged his head forward a little. Matt followed his gaze, and saw what at first appeared to be an ordinary section of floor. But when he looked closer, he saw that it was a little uneven.

"Right there," he said, pointing to it. "It looks like another one of those pressure plates."

Shade stepped forward, testing it. Sure enough, it sunk in. Behind them, a ways down the hall, there was a loud grating noise, and then a _whoosh_. He then noticed that all throughout the hallway, there were small slits in the wall.

"What the hell is that?" asked Ben.

"I don't know," said Trent. "But something tells me we need to get out of here."

"Agreed," said Matt. He pointed his flashlight back in curiosity and saw, just at the edge of the flashlight's beam, movement.

He kept watching, and he saw a giant blade sweep through the hallway. It came again, slightly closer.

"Run!" he yelled.

Ben, Trent, and Shade took off running. Matt followed them, but his leg had had enough. It finally gave out, and even with his poker he couldn't keep up. He collapsed to the floor, tried to get back up, and collapsed again.

When the others reached the wall, they turned around and saw Matt struggling to get to his feet and run.

"Matt!" Ben yelled. Shade shrieked in terror.

Matt saw a door crack in the beam from the flashlight as he was crawling along. "Get that door open!" he yelled. "Don't worry about me; I'll be fine!"

Ben and Trent grabbed onto the door and started pushing. Light spilled into the tunnel. Shade, however, ran over to Matt and nudged him with his head.

"Go, Shade!" Matt yelled. "I'll be okay!"

Shade wouldn't hear it. He bent over and nudged his head under Matt, so he rolled onto his neck. He ran down to the door, with Matt holding on tightly.

The blades were almost there. Shade started to squeeze through the door. He was going quicker than usual, but the blades were too close.

"Come on Shade!" Matt yelled.

"Come on, come on, come on," Ben muttered.

Shade was halfway through the door. The blades were a mere ten feet away, now, and rapidly coming closer.

He kept pushing forward, and was almost free. Matt turned around, and watched in horror as a blade fell from the opposite wall and flew towards them. He shut his eyes and waited to die.

But death didn't come. Shade gave one final heave and popped free from the door. He ran forward, the blade missing his tail by mere millimeters.

As the dragon slumped to the ground, Matt crawled from Shade's neck to his back; a riding position more comfortable for both of them. He lay there, hugging his neck. "Twice in one day, buddy," he said. "Thank you." Shade let out a warble, and sat down.

Trent observed their surroundings. They were in the middle of a forest. He sat down against a tree to rest for a moment. "Thank God that's over," he said. "We did it."

Ben sat down next to Matt and Shade. He looked up at Matt. "Hey, Matt," he said.

"Yeah?" Matt replied.

"Welcome home."

* * *

><p>So, what did you guys think? Let me know! I'm always happy to get feedback!

Same time, next week! We'll see what they do now that they're finally back in New Hampshire!

7. Chapter Six: Survivors

UGH I missed the deadline again. I had such a stressful weekend, it was ridiculous.

Anyway, this is a different kind of chapter, in which we see some new faces...

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies

* * *

><p>Chapter Six

Survivors

Harristown, New Hampshire

After Ben and Shade's wounds were treated and the four of them rested for a little while, they set off. They were still very far from their

destination; they had walked a long way off course while trying to get through the wall. At first, Shade had carried Matt on his back, but even he was starting to get tired. Matt found a stick and used it to hold himself up.

After a couple hours of walking, they finally made it to Harristown.

The place was a wreck compared to how Matt remembered it. Several buildings were destroyed, and cars were scattered everywhere; most of them wrecked. There were no zombies to be seen, but that didn't mean they weren't there.

"Z-Day hit you pretty hard," Matt observed.

"You don't know the half of it," Ben replied. "Some idiots went crazy and started blowing up everything in sight. They automatically assumed everyone else was going to try to kill them."

"What happened to them?" Matt asked.

"They blew each other up in a Mexican standoff."

"That'sâ€¦ niceâ€¦"

They walked for a while in silence, each keeping to their own thoughts. They were all very tired and just wanted to find a place to rest.

As he was walking, Matt observed the wreckage. Pangs of nostalgia and sadness shot through him as he remembered what this place used to be. It was a busy town, full of live people. Now, it was nothing but a ruin.

He remembered all the places he used to go. GameStop, the school, the used book store, the music store; all of it. Those were good times. He wanted them back, and it hurt to think that he would never get them.

After a while, they came to the biggest plaza in Harristown. It held a giant Wal-Mart, Staples, Home Depot, and some other stores. It was there that Matt broke the silence.

"We should look for survivors," he suggested.

Trent thought for a moment, then replied, "Okay, but where?"

"Well, I remember where three people used to live," Matt suggested. "I think we should split up to see if they're still alive. Ben, do you remember where Jean used to live?"

"Yeah, I remember," Ben replied.

"Well, I think you and Trent should look there, and me and Shade will look where Joey and Brian used to live."

"Okay," Trent agreed. "Where do you want to meet?"

"How about at Cumby's?" Matt suggested.

"Sounds good."

"What if we find survivors?" Trent asked

Matt thought for a moment. "Come back anyway. Unless they're in grave danger, they'll be able to fend for themselves a little longer if they've made it this far."

"Okay," said Trent.

"Yay, more walking," said Ben sarcastically. "I fucking love my life."

They parted ways. With Shade walking beside him, Matt set off for Brian's house.

"You holding up alright?" Matt asked.

Shade nodded wearily. It was obvious he was nearing the end of his rope, however. His pace was slower than before, and his movements more sluggish.

"Well, at least if we don't find them, we can use their house," Matt pointed out.

Shade grunted in agreement.

They walked for a while in silence. The thing about their friendship was that even when they were completely silent, and even though Shade had extremely limited communication with Matt, they were still just content to enjoy each other's company. Their limited communication had in time created a deeper level of understanding between them as they found ways to bypass this problem. In these dark times, Matt had been extremely grateful just to have a friend alongside him. So, despite all that had happened, Matt didn't feel too bad. He had made it through alive, and he had not just one, but now three friends to face whatever was next with him.

"Shade?" Matt asked.

Shade stopped for a moment and looked at him with mild curiosity.

"I just wanted to sayâ€¦ Thanks. For everything. I would never have made it this far without you."

Shade looked at him with warm eyes, his expression saying the same in return. He walked over to him and nudged his shoulder playfully with his head.

Matt grinned and patted Shade's head. Then, he scratched the scales on Shade's neck. Shade closed his eyes and opened his mouth slightly in pleasure, like a dog behind scratched behind the ears.

After a few seconds of this, Matt stopped. "Alright buddy," he said. "We've got to get moving."

Just before Brian's house came into sight, Matt stopped. "Hold on a second, Shade," he said.

The dragon stopped and looked at him questioningly.

"I think we should split up," said Matt. Shade looked at him as if he'd lost his mind, and he quickly explained, "Not far from each other; we'd still be able to help if one of us gets in trouble. I was just thinking that one of us should go behind his house, and the other should go in front. It'll give us a chance to scout out both sides at the same time, and we can flank any survivors that might get too trigger-happy."

Shade considered this for a moment, and then nodded in agreement.

"Alright, do you want front or back?" Matt asked.

Shade jerked his head backwards.

"Okay, then I'll take the front."

They walked forward until Brian's house came into view. "That's the one," he said, pointing to it. Shade slipped out of sight and Matt kept walking.

In truth, Matt didn't really think he was going to find anyone. It was mostly wishful thinking on his part. He had to be sure.

A minute later, he reached Brian's house. He attempted to open the door and it fell right out of the frame.

I highly doubt anyone lives here, he thought to himself. I'll go find Shade and we'll go to Joey's.

He walked into the house and almost laughed at the site in front of him. The front of the house was perfectly fine, yet the inside of the house was completely destroyed. Everything was charred black, and the entire back half of the house had been reduced to a pile of black rubble and soot. Sitting in front of the pile and looking at him, his tail curled around his paws, was Shade.

"Let's move on, shall we?" Matt suggested.

They proceeded to Joey's neighborhood. Shade was so tired that he felt like his paws were going to fall off. His legs ached, his shoulders ached, and even his wings ached a little bit. He tried not to think of the trip back to the meeting place that they would have to make. Instead, he set his thoughts to the present. He had made it through the wall alive. That was good. Matt had survived as well. Also good. As long as it stayed that way, than everything would be all right.

He wasn't sure what to expect from this next house. Like Matt, he didn't think that they would find anyone. But what if they did?

Shade had a suspicion that he might be forced to resort to more violent methods of contact if they found anyone. Survivors had a habit of being at least a little bit paranoid. And no matter how good his intentions, Shade, like most Night Furies, would most likely be seen as a threat.

Matt was possibly in even more danger. If they mistook him for a

zombie, he might not even make it within ten feet of their house.

_If they threaten us, I _will _threaten them back_, Shade thought to himself. _I don't want to, but I will_.

It was true that he didn't want to. Despite his slight lack of trust in them, he couldn't deny the fact that Ben and Trent were alright, and he was interested in meeting any other friends of Matt that might still be alive.

They entered another neighborhood. "Okay, Shade. Time to split up again," Matt announced. "That house over there is where we're going."

Shade slipped into the trees behind the houses. He was able to move slightly faster than Matt, so he beat him to the house. Due to his dark scales and the afternoon shadows the trees cast, he was able to blend in more than one might think.

When he made it behind the house, he heard something. He pricked his ears so he could hear it better, and what he heard surprised him.

He heard voices from inside the house. They were quiet, and he couldn't make out what they were saying, but they were definitely there.

Carefully, he stepped out of the woods into the backyard, approaching the slider door that led into the house. Suddenly, the voices stopped. Then, slightly louder, he heard someone say, "I'll go check."

There were footsteps heading his way. He froze, realizing that somehow he had alerted them. He had no time to hide- he just stood there and hoped they wouldn't be hostile.

The slider door opened, and a human of about Matt's age came out. He was skinny, a little on the short side, and had light brown hair of about average length. He was wearing a green shirt, blue jeans, and was holding a shotgun.

At first, he didn't see Shade. Shade was to his right, and he looked left first, searching, his gun at the ready. And then he turned his head and saw him.

He jumped, startled. "What the fuck?!" he yelled. Shade just sat there, putting on his best innocent face.

The human raised his gun and pointed it at Shade, his hands quivering. "A-a dragon? Are you really a dragon?" he asked. "Or am I seeing things?"

Shade stood up and took a step forward, attempting to convey the message that he wasn't a threat. Unfortunately, it didn't get through.

The human pumped the shotgun, and aimed it at Shade. "Don't come any closer!" he commanded.

Shade stopped walking, but still stared at the human. "It's okay," he

said. Even though he knew the human couldn't understand, he was hoping that the overall message would be conveyed. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The human kept pointing the gun at him. To be honest, he was starting to lose his patience.

It was then that the human made his mistake.

He fired the shotgun at Shade, purposefully missing, intending to scare him off. Shade instinctively jumped at him, and pinned him to the ground. With one scoop of his claws, he snatched the shotgun out of the human's hand and tossed it into the woods.

The human screamed, but Shade cut him off by striking his throat with his paw. His two outer claws pressed towards the ground, not reaching it, but holding the human's head in place. The other two dug into the skin of his neck, not piercing it, but still scratching. He roared in the human's face, at the same time extending his retractable teeth.

Maybe that wasn't the best idea, Shade thought. _Oh well; no going back now. Where the hell is Matt, anyway?_

"D-don't k-ki-kill me, p-please," the human stuttered when Shade stopped roaring.

"Yeah," came a voice behind them. "That would be a very bad idea."

Shade felt cold metal press against his head, and his heart sank.

Forgot about that one, he thought. _I'm just too tired for this today_.

"Brian!" the other human exclaimed hoarsely, as it was hard to talk normally when a claw was pressed against your throat. "What the _hell_ took you so long?"

"I was in the bathroom," Brian explained.

"Why the fuck were you in the bathroom?"

"I assumed it was just another zombie."

"Well obviously it's not 'just another damn zombie!'"

"Enough of this!" Shade growled. "Put that thing down, or I will kill the Small One!"

Even though it was a lie; Shade was in no more of a position to kill the other human than Brian was to kill him.

"You shut up," said Brian.

You little bastard

"Joey," said Brian. "What the hell are you doing being pinned to the ground by a dragon?"

"Yeah, Joey. Why are you being pinned to the ground by a dragon?" came Matt's voice behind them. "Better yet, why are you pointing a gun at said dragon, Brian?"

Brian sighed deeply. "Great," he said.

"Who is it?" asked Joey. "I can't turn my head!"

"I don't know, but I don't think that's a stick he's holding to my head," Brian replied.

"No, it's probably his dick," said Joey.

"No offense, but you aren't exactly in a position to be making insults right now, Joey," said Matt.

"Go to hell!"

"Did I not just say-"

"Look, we're not getting anywhere like this!" Shade growled, flicking his tail in annoyance.

Matt got the message. "Alright, alright!" he said. "Look, I don't want to kill you. I just want to talk, without weapons or death threats. So, let's all put our weapons down."

Nobody moved.

"Okayâ€¦ We don't trust each other. Right." Matt paused for a moment. "Joey, I want you to stay exactly as you are. Don't even move your head. Got it?"

"Fine," said Joey.

"Shade, get your claw away from his throat, but keep him held down."

Shade sighed. "Fine." He freed Joey's head and throat, but pressed the paw he had removed against his chest.

"Okay, Brian, put your gun down," Matt ordered.

"How can I trust you?" Brian asked. "You're holding a gun to my head. If I put mine down, there's nothing stopping you from shooting me."

"If I wanted to kill you, I would've done so before you knew I was here," Matt replied. "I had a perfectly clear shot."

For a moment, Brian must've been thinking it over in his head, because he said, "That makes sense." He put the gun down and Matt followed suit. "Now then," he said. "How long has it been, Brian? Eight months? It feels like so much longer."

"Who are yo-" Brian's voice was cut off. "Matt," he said, incredulous.

"What the fu-" Joey turned his head and was cut off. "Oh my God," he

repeated.

"I never thought I'd see you two again," Matt stated, holstering his pistol. "Sorry about that, by the way. I saw Shade in a mess, and had to get him out."

"It's okay," said Brian.

"This dragon is your friend?" asked Joey.

"Yeah."

"Well, could you please ask him to get the hell off of me?"

_Ohâ€| Right. _Shade thought. He had been distracted, and the thought that he should let Joey up hadn't crossed his mind. He removed his paw from Joey's chest and held it out to him.

"What is he doing?" Joey asked.

"I think he wants to help you up," Matt replied.

Joey hesitated, and then grabbed Shade's paw. Shade sat down on his hind legs, at the same time helping Joey to his feet. "Sorry about that," he said. He then looked at Brian for the first time. He was tall and thin, with short blond hair. He was wearing blue jeans as well, and a Hollywood Undead T-shirt.

"Shade, I'm sorry, but attacking Joey was really uncalled for," said Matt.

Shade lowered his head in shame.

"And Joeyâ€| No offense, but did you ignore everything Sam ever said about dragons? Why the hell did you shoot at one and miss?"

"I'm sorry!" Joey protested. "I was trying to scare it off!"

Shade growled slightly at the mention of him as 'it.'

"He's a guy," said Matt. "And that doesn't work. It just pisses them off."

Suddenly, Brian pointed his gun at Matt. "What's that wound?" he asked.

Shade growled ferociously, his eyes narrowing to slits. He took a step forward. "Don't you dare," he hissed.

Matt held his hands up. "Wait, Shade," he said. Then, speaking to Brian, he said, "It's okay. It's only a gunshot wound. I'll tell you more about it later, but I can assure you that wasn't bit."

Brian kept his gun pointed at him for a moment, then lowered it, saying, "All right. But I'm keeping an eye on you."

Shade backed off, sitting down. However, he kept watch on Brian.

"I'm really sorry about that," said Matt. "We were looking for you."

We wanted to know if you were still alive, and, well, it looks like you are. I was hoping that our reunion would be a littleâ€¦ nicer."

"It's okay," said Brian. "I just can't believe you're still alive too"

"We thought you were dead, Matt," said Joey.

"I thought the same about you," said Matt. "I just wanted to be sure. Looks like I was wrong."

"So, do you want to come in?" asked Brian. "You andâ€¦ Shade, was it?"

Shade nodded. He was hesitant; he didn't really like them at the moment, but he trusted Matt, so he would give them a chance.

"You and Shade can stay here for a bit if you need to," Brian offered.

"Wait a minute," said Joey. "That dragon almost killed me, and you're asking him to spend the night?"

"Joey, if he wanted to kill you, you'd have been dead long before Brian got outside," said Matt. "He felt threatened, that's all."

"Oh fine," Joey gave in. "But if I die tonight, it's your fault Brian!"

"So do you want to come in or not?" asked Brian.

"I'd love to, but I can't at the moment," Matt replied. "I was supposed to meet Ben and Trent-"

"Ben?!" Joey asked, in shock. "Ben's alive too?!"

"Yeah. He and his friend Trent- the lead singer of Still We're Forgotten- are meeting us at Wal-Mart. They're searching other parts of Harristown for survivors."

Great, Shade thought. _More walking._

"So let me get this straight," said Brian. "Not only are you and Ben alive, but you've teamed up with a famous singer and a dragon?"

"Well, to be specific, we both survived, but in different places without knowing each other was alive. I met and became best friends with a Night Fury, and Ben met and became best friends with a famous singer. We met up yesterday, and now we're here."

Brian turned to Joey. "Joey, what did you put in my drink this morning?"

"I can't remember," Joey replied. "But whatever it was, it was good shit."

"Anyway, can we stay here afterwards?" Matt asked.

"Sure," said Brian. "You're welcome to stay for as long as you need."

"Thanks," said Matt. He started to walk away, and Shade followed him, keeping an eye on Brian and Joey as he went.

"Wait," said Matt, stopping for a moment.

"Yeah?" asked Brian.

"What happened back here anyway?" asked Matt.

"Well, we have some hidden motion sensors out here," Brian explained. "Shade set one off, and when Joey went to check what happenedâ€¦ I think the rest is self-explanatory."

Matt and Shade went back to meet Ben and Trent at the Cumberland Farms gas station. They were both completely worn out. Not only were they exhausted, but they had had no luck whatsoever finding survivors. But when Matt told them what happened, they immediately cheered up.

An hour later, all six of them were at Joey's house, having a reunion and getting reacquainted with each other in his living room. In the background the song "No. 5" by Hollywood Undead was playing. Brian and Joey sat on one couch while Ben and Trent sat on another and Matt and Shade sat on the floor.

"I can't believe we actually found you," Ben commented, taking a sip of vodka.

"I can't believe you found us either," said Brian. "We thought you were all dead."

The four of them were incredibly tired. Matt was sore all over, and his gunshot wound throbbed menacingly. Shade, who was normally social, was lying on the floor, his eyes closed. Matt was sitting against his back, scratching Shade's neck while conversing with the others.

"So, what's your story?" asked Joey.

"Well," said Trent. "We could get into that, but it would probably take up an hour of our time. Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Who cares?" Matt replied, even though the question wasn't directed to him. "We're alive and we have shelter. And we found new friends. I don't care what we talk about at this point. Unless, that is, we're planning on killing Shade while he's asleep, or something," he added, jokingly.

Shade's ears pricked at this, and his tail slapped Matt in the face playfully.

"Hmâ€¦" said Matt. "I could've sworn he was asleep."

"I'm with Matt," said Brian.

"Okay," said Trent. "Who wants to go first?"

Ben raised his hand. "Oh! Oh! Pick me!"

"Ben, you may speak," said Joey.

"Yay," he exclaimed gleefully. He then proceeded to tell them the same story he told Matt and Trent before. He told them about Z-Day, about getting out of New Hampshire, and about meeting Trent in Chicago, and then all the way to their meeting with Matt and Shade.

Then, Trent took over. He told them his story. As Z-Day broke out, he had been playing a concert in Los Angeles. Everything had been going fine, and then suddenly the crowd went crazy. The zombies started killing people left and right, and before the band even knew what was going on, they were on stage. They killed all of his band members. Trent tried to go home to save his family, but he was too late- they had already been killed. Distraught, he swore that he would find a way to rid the world of the zombies.

"And I think I found a way to do it," said Trent.

Brian and Joey stared in a disbelieving silence. "How?" asked Joey, incredulous. "How are you going to kill all the zombies in the world? Are you going to fly to each country, and take a head count- literally- of all the zombies?"

"No," said Trent. "I'm not sure exactly how I'm going to do it. Yet. But get this; you know that there was a laboratory in New Hampshire, right?"

"Yeahâ€|" said Brian.

"Well," Trent began, "There was another. They didn't tell anyone about this one. It was the heart of the whole operation, and it was in New Hampshire- which is actually why they built the wall around it. I don't know what they were doing, but the info I found strongly suggests there's a solution there."

"Where is it?" asked Brian.

"I don't know," said Trent. "Only that it's underground, like the rest of them."

"Why New Hampshire?" asked Joey. "Why here, of all places?"

"Because nobody would expect it," Trent replied.

There was silence for a moment. Then, everyone started laughing.

"Ahahaha, stupid New Hampshire," Joey commented.

"Live free or die! Literally," Ben exclaimed.

"So what's your story, Matt?" asked Brian.

Matt thought back, remembering all that had happened. "Well, I was in Colorado for Z-Dayâ€| But you know that," he began. "I don't really like to think about Z-Day. Too many bad things happened. But after

America fell, I stayed in Colorado for a month, trying to pick myself up. When I finally did, I started walking."

He continued, telling them about meeting Shade and about their times together. He told them about Shade's accident, and they laughed. Shade glared at them. Matt then told them about the days after that, and then Lawrence. They laughed again when he told them about his wound, but were silenced when he mentioned the horde.

"It was the biggest any of us have ever seen," said Matt. "It shouldn't have been that big. Every zombie in the city was being drawn to us. It makes no sense."

"That's so weird," Brian commented.

"Great, now the zombies are getting smart," said Joey.

"I wouldn't say that," said Trent. "But it's still disturbing."

For a bit, nobody was sure what to say. Finally, Brian changed the subject. "So, what did you guys do after you met up?"

"Well," Ben began, "We went back to room 69 and had a happy reunion. And then I got drunk. But, anyways, the next day, we went through the wall, which turned out to be designed by James Wan."

"Wait," said Joey. "You got through the wall?"

"Yeah," said Matt. "It was hard, but we did it."

"We tried to get through once," said Brian. "It killed Will."

"What?" Matt said, shocked. "Steve was killed like that? That must've been horrible."

"Yeahâ€¦ It was," Brian replied. He and Joey shared a sorrowful glance.

"I'm sorryâ€¦" said Trent.

"What exactly happened here on Z-Day?" Matt asked.

"Well," Joey began. "Me, Brian, and a bunch of our friends teamed up to escape. Only five of us escaped the school. One of us was killed on the road to Brian's house."

"When we got to my house, my family was gone," Brian continued, starting to choke up a little. "Some lunatic was hiding there. Phil went in first, but it was rigged, and the whole house exploded. It killed both him and the asshole."

"Wowâ€¦" said Matt. "That's horrible. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," said Brian. "Bad things happened to all of us. Anyway, me, Joey, and Will stayed here for a bit. After the America fell, I mean. Things started getting worse, so we tried to leave. It took us forever to find the door that led into the wall, but we eventually did. But when we got in, there were theseâ€¦ blades that were swinging from the wall. They cut Steve almost in half, right in front

of usâ€| he trailed off.

"We couldn't go back after that," said Joey. "And we couldn't find another way. So we're stuck here. We didn't want to leave Harristown becauseâ€| Even with all that's happening, it's still home."

Once again, the room was quiet. Then, Ben spoke. "You said things were getting worse. What do you mean?"

"There's shit going on everywhere you look," said Joey. "Today, there weren't many out, but usually Harristown is zombie paradise. A group of trigger-happy lunatics put up a wall all around Gunnerville, and shoot or capture anything that comes near. Then there's the group in Norbury at war with Gunnerville. The Gunnerville people want Norbury as their own, but the Norbury people refuse to give it up. We haven't heard anything from Lyndrich in months."

"God," said Matt. "Looks like we went out of the frying pan and into the fire."

"I'll say," said Ben. "Hasn't anything good happened to you?"

"Well," Brian began. "We just met up with you. That's one thing. Also, we're both still alive."

"Also, Sam might still be alive," Joey added.

"Really?" Matt and Ben said in excited unison.

"Yeah. It's a small chance, but it's a chance all the same."

"How do you know?" Ben asked.

"We saw him a while ago," Brian explained. "After about a month, right after Steve died, he came through town from Vermont. Apparently he took a plane or something and crashed it on the other side, but made it out alive."

At this, Ben was grinning, and trying not to laugh.

"We offered for him to stay with us, but he declined," Brian continued. "He said he wanted to go home. He stayed in contact, that is, until the Gunnerville crazies moved in and cut off all communication."

"I hope he's still alive," said Matt.

About an hour later, their spirits were back up again. In fact, they were higher than they had been in a long time. It was dark out, Ben was drunk again, and they were all playing cards. The song "Been To Hell" by Hollywood Undead was playing in the background.

Matt and Trent had taught Shade how to play BS. It wasn't easy, considering Shade was a dragon and had no opposable thumbs, but he developed a system of playing. The humans even made up a "BS" signal for him: he would slap the person in the face with his tail.

They started a new round. Trent had the ace of spades, and he put it down. "Bullshit!" Ben yelled.

"Ben, why the hell would he lie about that?" Joey asked.

"He just is," said Ben.

Ben took the card and added it to his hand. Up next was Joey. He looked through his hand, and put down two cards. "Two twos," he said.

"Bullshit!" Ben yelled.

"God damn it!" Joey exclaimed. He took the cards back.

Brian's turn. He looked through his hand and put down three cards. "Three threes," he said.

Matt had two threes. Brian couldn't possibly have three. He was about to call BS when Ben yelled, "Bullshit!"

"Dang!" Brian exclaimed, laughing. He took the cards back.

Matt's turn. He looked through his cards. He had one four. Could he get away with lying?

Probably not outright, Matt thought. _Butâ€|_

He took two cards; the four and a three. Before taking them out of his hand, he pushed them together so that from in front or behind they looked like only one card. Then, he put them down. "One four," he said.

"Bullshit!"

_Damn. _Matt took the cards back.

Now it was Shade's turn.

Shade had hidden his cards with his wing. He looked at his cards, his reptilian face furrowed in contemplation. Then, with his claw, he flipped some over and dragged three of them out. He pushed them into the center in a rough pile.

Three fives.

"Bullshit!" Ben yelled.

Shade leaned forward, smacked Ben in the face with his tail, and with his paw flung the cards at him. There were three fives.

Everyone laughed.

Then it was Ben's turn. Everyone watched as he put down his entire hand and said, "One six."

Everyone yelled "Bullshit!" in unison, including Ben. Shade smacked him with his tail again.

They started the round over, everyone yelling at Ben until he agreed to play seriously this time. After a few more games, they stopped playing, and just talked for a while. All of them, that is, except

for Ben, who was passed out on the couch. Two hours later, they decided that it was time for bed.

"You guys want to use the two bedrooms upstairs?" Joey asked. "There's three; one for me and Brian, and my parents' and sister's old rooms."

"No, I've got to stay here," Trent replied. "This guy can't fend for himself like this if the zombies decide to break in. In fact, I'll take the first watch if you want."

"Okay," said Brian. "How about you?" he asked Matt.

Matt thought for a moment, and then replied, "Sure, me and Shade will use one." It had been forever since he had last slept in a bed.

"Okay, you can have my parents' old room," said Joey.

They all parted ways. Matt and Shade retired to the bedroom Joey had designated for them. Matt got into his pajamas (he still had a pair for special occasions) and got into bed. Shade jumped up and was just able to squeeze his body onto the bed as well, even though his tail drooped off onto the floor.

Matt thought about things for a bit before he was able to fall asleep. A revelation dawned on him; they couldn't move like this anymore. They needed to lie low for a bit to recuperate. They were wounded and weak, and needed rest.

"Shade," Matt said.

The Night Fury grunted in response.

"Do you want to stay here for a week or so?" he asked. "To give your wing a chance to heal?"

Shade lifted his head and looked at him, nodding excitedly.

"Okay," said Matt. "I'll talk to the others about it tomorrow."

Shade nudged Matt's head in affection. Matt patted his head, and scratched the scales on his neck. "Goodnight," he said.

Ten minutes later, they were both asleep.

* * *

><p>Well, let me know what you think! I'll hope to see you again this weekend- on time, this time.

8. Chapter Seven: Snowfall

So, here's a new chapter guys! And on time this week, too! This chapter is a short, laid back one. No major plot developments, just some relaxing character interaction.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy it!

* * *

<p>Chapter Seven

****Snowfall****

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

The next morning, Matt shared his idea with the others while they were eating breakfast.

"That's a great idea," said Trent. "I feel like I've been mugged, and I wasn't even hurt. I can only imagine how bad you guys must feel."

It was true. Matt felt like his leg had been doused in kerosene, and he was sure Shade's wing was feeling the same.

"Holy shit," said Joey. "You know what I just realized?"

"What?" asked Ben, holding a cold bottle of vodka to his aching head.

"It's December first. It's almost Christmas."

"Holy shit," Matt repeated. "You're right." His mind began to wander back to the times before Z-Day; the Christmases he had seen. They had been beautiful, wondrous times for the most part, and throughout the good and the bad they were some of the things he missed most. He missed the feeling of family, and the fun of exchanging gifts. All of it was gone now. It would never come again.

The other four seemed to be thinking the same thing.

Finally, Ben broke the silence, changing the subject. "You don't happen to have any shaving equipment, do you?" he asked.

"Actually, we do," Brian replied. "We have a generator that we use for showering, shaving, and washing clothes. We used to use it all the time, but we started running out of gas really quickly, so now we only use it for that."

"Perfect," said Trent. "Can we use it?"

"Sure, why not?"

They started up the generator and took turns using the various appliances. The water was dirty, but they were so grateful to have it that they didn't care.

Matt washed his clothes first, and as he was taking them off, he noticed his iPod in the pocket of his pants.

He decided to listen to some music. He plugged his headphones into the iPod and hit shuffle. As he started to wash his clothes, the opening, upbeat notes of John Powell's "See You Tomorrow"- from the How To Train Your Dragon soundtrack- started playing.

Over the next few days, they spent most of the time scavenging from stores, playing card games, and shooting zombies. While scavenging,

Matt found a new sweatshirt that looked exactly like his old one, and got some anti-biotics to treat his gunshot wound.

They invented a game to see who could make the most creative kills. Every once in a while, someone would set some sort of trap for a zombie to fall into. If people liked it, the person got a point. Everyone was keeping track of their points, and so far, Ben was winning, with Shade close behind.

They also had a habit of playing practical jokes on each other. Ben and Shade were the biggest jokers. Shade's jokes were usually the worst, because they often involved being burned.

One day, Ben and Shade teamed up. Joey was walking near the trees, when he activated a trip wire. It caught his foot and dragged him up into the tree, hanging him upside-down. At the same time, Shade shot a burst of fire at his feet, sending him flying into the air. He kept going until the rope caught, and he fell back down.

He wasn't very happy about that. The next day, Ben and Shade did it to a zombie instead.

On December 8th, the first snowfall came. It happened overnight, while everyone was asleep. Come morning, there were six inches of snow on the ground.

When Matt and Shade got up that morning, they stepped outside to observe the white landscape. As they were marveling at it, Matt received a snowball to the face. He heard the laughter of Brian and Joey from off to the side.

"What the hell?" Matt protested. He scooped up his own snowball and hit Brian in the chest.

"Before this goes any further," said Trent, appearing from around the corner of the house. "I say we wake Ben up."

Ben was the kind of person who never woke up until around 11 o'clock, unless someone else woke him up. It was only 8:30 then, so unless they woke him up themselves, he wouldn't be able to join them.

"Okay," said Matt. He was about to go inside, when Joey stopped him.

"Wait," he said. "I have an idea."

"What's that?" Matt asked.

Joey explained his scheme to everyone.

Matt grinned. "Let's do it," he said.

Joey made the biggest snowball he could, and the five of them went inside. They went upstairs to the third bedroom, which Trent and Ben had moved into. Ben had gotten the bed that night; he and Trent, as well as Brian and Joey, switched between sleeping in the bed and on the floor every night. They gathered around the bed and watched Joey do his work.

Joey approached Ben, who was in a deep sleep. As quickly as he could, he lifted the covers and placed the snowball on top of Ben's pants. As soon as he was done, they all cleared out.

When they got outside, Matt turned to Shade, laughing. "He's gonna be pissed when he wakes up." He waited for the dragon to agree, but then noticed that he seemed overwhelmed. His eyes darted over the snow as if he had never seen it before. That's when Matt realized that he hadn't seen snow before. He'd spent his entire life cooped up in a lab, and had never been out during the winter. Snow was an alien concept to him.

Matt walked over to him. "You've never seen snow before, have you?"

Shade shook his head.

"That's too bad," said Matt. "We get it up here a lot. Expect a lot more where this came from. It's basically a bunch of little ice crystals that are so small they appear as powder. It's very fun; I used to always go sledding, and skiing" Matt trailed off, realizing Shade probably had no idea what he was talking about. "You know what? I'm going to show you how much fun you can have with snow."

He made a snowball, and threw it at Joey, yelling, "Snowball fight!"

Joey whirled around, about to say something. He only managed to get out, "Wha-" before the snowball slammed into his face.

Trent burst out laughing.

Behind them, in the house, a yell came from upstairs.

"WHAT THE FUCK?!"

"Looks like Ben's awake," Brian observed.

"Good," said Joey. "He deserves it for hanging me from a tree. Speaking of which" he trailed off, and made a snowball. "You're responsible for that too, Shade," he said, before throwing it at him.

Shade tried to duck out of the way, but it hit his wing. He responded by playfully tackling Joey.

Ben came out, and was extremely pissed. So pissed that he took advantage of Joey's helplessness and used it to repeatedly shove Joey's face into the snow.

Within minutes, they had all engaged in a full-on snowball fight. It wasn't long before they became freezing, sopping wet. They were having the time of their lives. Even Shade was participating in the fight, albeit with very poorly-constructed snowballs. At one point, a zombie wandered into the backyard, and was promptly bombarded with snowballs, before being incinerated in a blast of fire.

After a half hour or so, the cold started getting to them. They went back inside, lit a fire, and huddled around it. Shade allowed Matt to

use his wing as a makeshift blanket, in a very successful attempt to get warm. Ben claimed his other wing, even though almost everyone was yelling at him to share.

"Sharing is caring, and caring is bad," he responded.

"You know," said Brian. "We could get some blankets from upstairs."

"You get them," said Joey. "I don't want to leave this fire."

"One of you two should get them," said Trent.

"No thanks," said Ben. "I'm too lazy."

"And I'm way too warm and comfortable," Matt added.

"Fuck you," said Joey, giving them the finger.

"You wish," said Ben.

"You know what? I'll get them," said Trent. He walked out of the room, punching Ben in the back of the head as he walked out.

"Ow," Ben complained.

"Shut up," said Joey.

"I'm starting to regret having a snowball fight in a T-shirt," said Brian.

"Yeah, that really wasn't a good ideaâ€|" Matt agreed.

A half hour later, when they were all warmed up, they made breakfast. As he was eating, it suddenly occurred to Matt that it had been a while since he had checked on Shade's wing. He turned to Shade and asked, "Hey Shade, is your wing still sore?" As he waited for a reply, he looked at the wing himself. The scar was still there, but it would probably always be. He could still fly with a scar.

Shade shook his head.

Matt contemplated this for a moment, then said, "You wanna fly today?"

Shade froze, his eyes widening and his ears pricking up. Then, he practically jumped on Matt, nodding in excitement.

Matt held him back, laughing. "Okay, okay, calm down," he said. He turned to the others. "Hey guys," he called.

They looked up at him.

"You want to fly a dragon later?"

At around 10:30, they were all outside again.

"Alright, I'm going first," said Matt. "I'm not sure how this will work out." He climbed onto Shade's back and settled into his riding position. He didn't have a saddle; he wasn't sure how to make one,

and you couldn't exactly find a dragon saddle at your local Wal-Mart, so he rode bareback.

He wrapped his arms around Shade's neck and held on tightly. Takeoff was usually rough, and would be especially rough this time, seeing as it was his first time in weeks. "You ready?" he asked.

Shade nodded, grunting in anticipation.

"Okay," said Matt. He reached into his pocket and pressed the Play button on his iPod. John Powell's "Test Drive" began playing in his ear.

How fitting, Matt thought.

"Go!" he commanded.

Shade took off running, and Matt held on for dear life. After a few paces, Shade jumped into the air and flapped his wings. At first, it didn't look like he would make it. He dipped dangerously close to the ground, but at the last second, he pulled through. He shot into the sky, soaring high above the houses and trees. When he was high enough, he locked into his altitude for a few minutes, taking it easy and getting used to the feeling once more.

Matt risked letting go of Shade's neck. He raised his arms into the sky, and yelled as loud as could in excitement. Shade roared with him, and shot a ball of fire into the sky above.

Matt returned his arms to Shade's neck, holding on again. Feeling this, Shade decided it was time to speed things up. With a sudden jerk, he flipped downward, and dived. Matt yelled, adrenaline coursing through his body. Shade exited the dive and flipped in the air several times. Matt held on even tighter, and dug his feet into Shade's body. After a while, Shade decided he'd had enough, and stopped flipping, opting instead for a peaceful soar.

"Looks like you can finally fly again," said Matt. He felt more at peace than he had in months.

After a few minutes, Shade needed to rest. He landed back in Joey's backyard, where the others were cheering. They were very impressed.

Shade sat down for a minute, resting his wing. "Think you can manage another flight in a few minutes?" Matt asked him.

Shade nodded.

"Alright, who's next?" Matt asked.

It was decided, through much "reasonable debate", that Brian would go next. When Shade was ready, Matt helped Brian onto the dragon's back and explained everything to him.

"Sit like this," Matt said, gesturing to Brian's posture. "And don't let go. Keep your arms around his neck unless he's flying straight. If you don't, wellâ€¦ Bad things will happen.

"Hold on as tight as possible and don't try anything stupid. Now, let

him know when you're ready." Matt walked over to Shade's head. "Go easy on him, okay?" he requested, patting him in the head. "We don't to scare him too badly."

"Hey!" Brian exclaimed.

Shade snorted in agreement.

Matt stood back with the others. After a minute, Brian said nervously, "Okay Shade, let's go."

Shade ran forward and took off, and Brian started screaming in a mix of excitement and terror. Shade did his thing; flying smoothly and peacefully at some parts, and then diving and looping at others. When he finally came back, Brian looked like he had just been through hell. He quickly got off of Shade. "How was it?" Matt asked.

"That was the most terrifying thing I've ever done," said Brian. "And it was amazing."

Matt laughed. "That was my reaction the first time, too," he said. He walked over to Shade, who was holding his wing at an odd angle. "Your wing okay?" he asked. Shade nodded, but his expression was pained.

"Sore?" Matt asked.

Shade nodded.

"Do you think you're done today?"

Shade nodded.

Matt turned to the others. "He's done for today," he said. "Sorry."

Ben, Joey, and Trent groaned.

"Sorry! You'll get your turns tomorrow."

Later, they went scavenging for food in town. There weren't as many zombies out as usual, although there were still plenty more than there had been when Matt, Ben, Trent, and Shade had come through eight days earlier. They made a game out of it, and tried to have as much fun as possible killing the zombies. After all, when it was an everyday task for them, why not try to make it as fun as possible?

At one point, they split up. Brian, Joey, and Trent went to plaza where Wal-Mart was, and Matt, Ben, and Shade walked further up the road until they reached the strip mall that contained GameStop.

While they were walking, Ben noticed the T-Mobile store right next to the GameStop. As he looked at it, an idea popped into his head.

He walked over to Shade, and whispered in his ear. "Hey Shade. You know it's very cold out here, right? A little fire would be nice, wouldn't it? If you know what I mean."

Shade's ears pricked; he was interested.

"You see that T-Mobile store there?" Ben asked, pointing to it.
"Well, their service sucks. I'm going to lead a group of zombies in there, and when I yell 'Fire!' you're going to blow them to hell. What do you say?"

Shade nodded.

"Okay," said Ben. "Let's get started."

He spotted a group of zombies down the street. Loading his gun, he took off towards them, firing a few rounds into the group, but making sure most of them missed.

"You wanna taste of this?!" he yelled. "Come at me!"

The zombies shambled towards him. "Ben, what the hell?!" Matt exclaimed.

"Hold on," said Ben. "I know what I'm doing."

"I highly doubt that, but okay!"

Ben waited for the zombies to get close, then backed up. The zombies followed, their numbers getting slowly but steadily bigger as they went. Every once in a while, Ben would fire a few shots to keep it from getting too big. He backed up to the T-Mobile and stepped through the door, which had been shattered at some point during or after Z-Day.

"Are you insane?!" Matt yelled.

Ben ignored him and continued into the store. The zombies followed him. When he decided that they were close enough, he ran around the group and out the door. Running away as fast as he could, he yelled, "Fire!"

Shade shot, and the T-Mobile's windows exploded in a cloud of fire. He shot another one and the roof collapsed in. To finish the job, he fired one last time, and the walls collapsed. When the explosions cleared off, there was nothing left but charred, burning ruins and dead zombies.

Matt stared, dumbstruck. Ben walked over to him. "I believe that's a point for each of us," he said.

While they were scavenging, Trent, Brian, and Joey had found some fireworks. A whole lot of them. They decided to light them off that night. So, after they had dinner, while it was dark, they got flashlights and hiked to another neighborhood. Once there, Ben and Joey took the fireworks and laid them out in a line, connecting them all with one fuse.

Trent, Matt, and Brian got lawn chairs and sat in front of the back door. Shade was lying next to them, watching them curiously.

When Ben and Joey were done setting up the fireworks, Ben took a strike-all match out of his pocket and struck it on one of them. He lit the fuse, and the two of them ran over to watch with the others,

who were standing a good distance away.

"You do realize we're going to have to get going as soon as this is over?" asked Trent. "This is going to attract a shitload of zombies."

"Yeah, but it'll be worth it," Joey replied.

The small flame fizzled away, until it reached the end of the fuse. The firework exploded upwards, and the sky lit up with a mosaic of fiery patterns and colors. They all looked up in amazement; it had been much too long since any of them had seen any fireworks. Shade, in fact, had never seen any.

Looking back, Matt realized this day was the happiest one he had had since Z-Day. The whole last week had been. He felt as if the good times would never end.

He should have realized that they would.

* * *

><p>Hope you liked it! If you're upset by the lack of any plot or character development, I'll tell you that next weekend's chapter will be much more exciting :) Anyway, let me know what you think.

9. Chapter Eight: Good Times, Bad Times

I don't really have any time to say much because Game of Thrones is on in twenty minutes and there's a lot more I have to get done tonight. But anyway, I hope you guys enjoy the chapter!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or night furies blah blah blah

* * *

><p>Chapter Eight:

Good Times, Bad Times

Harristown, New Hampshire

That day was the happiest day of Matt's post Z-Day life. After that, everything went downhill. They began to grow restless, and tensions began to rise. Matt and Trent started to cause arguments among the group. They both wanted to move on. Matt wanted to look for more survivors, and Trent wanted to look for the solution to the zombie problem. They both felt that they had stayed much too long. But the others didn't want to leave just yet. They were happy where they were, and for Matt and Trent, that was irritating, and at times downright infuriating.

On December 14th, this tension came to a climax, when Ben made one of the dumbest mistakes of his life.

Matt, Shade, Brian, and Joey had gone out to get food. Ben and Trent had stayed behind to watch the house; they hadn't had that much fun

on patrol recently, and had decided to start a guard duty.

When it happened, the two of them were just ending a massive argument, and Trent had retreated upstairs to cool off by sniping some zombies from the window. Ben, having nothing to do, decided to surprise the others with a creative zombie kill.

He decided to try something he had wanted to do for a while; make a Molotov cocktail. He grabbed a bottle of alcohol from his seemingly-never-ending supply and opened it. He accidentally spilled some on the floor, but he ignored them, deciding to clean them up after. He took a rag and stuck it into the bottle.

Placing the newly-made cocktail on the kitchen table, Ben looked around for his Zippo lighter. He saw it on the other side of the table, so he walked over and picked it up.

As he was making his way back around the table, he fiddled with the lighter with his hand, and absentmindedly activated it. A tiny wisp of flame appeared. At the same moment, his foot came down on top of the spilt vodka, and he slipped.

His reflexes kicked in and he grabbed the table edge. He managed to catch and steady himself, but knocked over the vodka, spilling it all over the table top, the floor, and his pants. At the same time, he dropped the lighter, and the alcohol caught fire.

"Shit!" he exclaimed. Heat and pain flared up his legs. His pants were on fire. Without even stopping to think about the rest of the fire, he ran outside and jumped into the snow. He rolled around until the fire was extinguished, and then laid there for a moment, a feeling of relief passing over him.

And then he remembered the kitchen.

"Fuck me sideways!" he exclaimed, getting back to his feet and running back into the kitchen. In the time he had spent outside, the fire had gotten much worse. The entire tabletop was alight, as well as two of the legs. To make matters worse, the wall was starting to catch as well.

Ben ran to the refrigerator and opened it, looking for something to put out the fire with. Unfortunately, they were all out of water.

He opened the covers, looking for baking soda, or anything like it. No such luck.

"Shit!" he yelled. "Shit shit shit!"

He ran upstairs and opened the door to the bedroom Trent was in. "Trent!" he exclaimed. "The kitchen's on fire!" The other man wasted no time in rushing down the stairs.

The fire had spread even more now. "Quick! Get some buckets! We can use some snow!" Trent yelled.

They found some buckets in a closet and ran outside to the snowbanks. As fast as they could, they filled the buckets with it and ran back into the house to pour it over the fire. Then they repeated the process several times. But they weren't quick enough; the fire was

spreading faster than they could put it out. It was hopeless.

"This isn't going anywhere," Ben observed. "We need to get our stuff out right now."

"Okay," Trent agreed.

They ran inside and upstairs to gather their belongings, as well as those of their friends. They piled them all outside and waited.

As they watched the house with weight hearts, Ben had a vision of an open refrigerator door with alcohol in it, and panicked. "Shit!" he yelled.

"What?" Trent asked.

"All that booze in the fridge, and all that fire. We need to get out of here, no-"

He was cut off as an explosion rocked the house, shattering the windows, and sending a burst of flame through them. The shock wave lifted them off of their feet and sent them sprawling into the snowbank behind them.

"Never mind," he groaned as he clutched at his ears. They were filled with a high-pitched ringing noise.

Once he regained his ability to stand, Trent did so and looked at the house in shock. "What in the _blue_ _fuck _just happened?!" he yelled.

Ben looked guilty. "Wellâ€¦"

Trent rounded on him. "Did you cause this?!"

"I was just trying to make a Molotov..."

"So, because you 'just wanted to make a Molotov,' we now have no shelter!" Trent yelled. "Way to go!"

"What are you so mad about, anyway?" Ben asked. "You've been bitching all throughout the last week about how we need to leave!"

Trent sighed. He was silent for a moment.

"What are we going to tell the others?" he asked. "Where are we supposed to call home now? Yes, I wanted to leave, but I wanted a place to come back to! Where are we going to go now?!" He shook his head and pointed at Ben. "You're a dead man," he said. "A dead man."

They stood there for a while in silence. Shame and guilt overtook Ben as the house burned.

"You did what?!"

The others had returned, and had practically exploded with rage. It had been a bad day for them already; they had found almost nothing while scavenging. And now, to make things worse, they had arrived at home to find nothing but a burning shell of what was once their

comfortable home. To top it off, the explosion was beginning to attract zombies. Matt, Shade, and Trent picked them off while Brian and Joey figuratively tore Ben apart.

"I'm sorry!" Ben exclaimed.

"You're sorry?" Joey replied. "You're _sorry_?! You just burned my house down, and all you say is 'you're sorry'?! Fuck you! FUCK! YOU!"

"Where are we going to go?" Brian questioned. "Where the hell are we going to go?!"

"Guys!" Matt called. No response. "Guys!" he yelled this time, but they still didn't hear him over their arguing.

"GUYS!"

"What?!" Joey and Brian yelled in unison.

"Look, I understand that you're pissed right now," he said. "But we can talk about this later. Right now, we need to find somewhere safe to go."

"He's right," Trent agreed.

"But where?" asked Joey. "Where are we going to go?"

Matt thought hard about that. Then, an idea popped into his head.

"How about the school?" Matt suggested.

They looked at him in surprise and confusion.

"Think about it," he said. "It's big enough to shelter us and any other survivors we might find, and still have more room to fight and hide if zombies get in. On top of that, there are showers, kitchens, and even books in case we get bored."

"Hmmmâ€|" said Ben. "I do like booksâ€|"

"Shut up," said Joey. "You have no say in this." He thought for a moment. "But right now, that's sounding better than staying here."

"Yeahâ€|" said Brian. "You know, I never thought I'd say this again, but let's go to school."

They set off immediately.

The streets of Joey's neighborhood were hazardous, but not impassably so. They were just able to slip by without attracting too much attention. But as they made their way to the main road, it got much harder. The roads that led to the school were clogged with zombies.

"Let's move downtown," Trent suggested. "We can see if there's a pass at Cumby's, or somewhere around there."

Following Trent's plan, they cut through the forest until they emerged on the other side of the street from Cumby's- or, as it was called by its full name, Cumberland Farms. The roads in between them and the convenience store were just as hazardous as the previous route, and it became clear then that they would have to do some sneaking to get to the school.

As soon as they arrived in sight of the horde, the six of them immediately dropped to the ground. "Should we attack?" Matt asked. "Or should we let them pass?"

"We could probably take them on," Trent replied. "The question is, do we want to?"

"I don't know man," said Joey. "That's a big-ass horde."

"How much ammo do we have?" asked Brian.

Everybody was silent for a few moments as they checked their ammo. Matt had enough, but he would need more soon.

"Enough," said Trent. "But just barely."

It was the same for everyone else.

"I say we let them pass," Brian stated. "That way we can save our ammo for a real emergency."

"Agreed," said Matt.

"Aw, I wanted to shoot stuff up," Ben complained.

"Shut up you jackwagon," said Joey. "You aren't allowed to talk anymore."

"You're a mean leprechaun," said Ben.

Joey lunged at him. "You son of a bitch!" he exclaimed, swinging his fist. Brian and Trent restrained the two of them.

"Stop it!" Trent hissed. "Are you trying to get us killed?"

When Joey had calmed down, they laid there in silence, doing the best they could to remain unnoticed, especially Shade, who had the hardest time doing so due to his size. After a few minutes, when the horde was finally gone, they stood back up.

"That was sketchy," Matt breathed, brushing dirt off of his clothes.

"I'll say," said Brian. "That horde was huge."

"Alright," said Trent as he stood up. "Let's get moving before another horde comes."

Matt stood up after him and turned to Shade. "I think you should wait on the other side. If another horde comes, you won't be able to hide."

Shade let out a whimper of concern. He didn't want to leave him alone

in a place like this.

Matt patted the dragon's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "Don't worry; I'll be fine," he reassured. "Tell you what; listen for gunshots. If anything goes wrong, you'll hear them, and you can come right back. Okay?"

Shade gave in and nodded. But he didn't like it.

"Okay. So, go in that direction," Matt said, gesturing towards the school. "Land somewhere between here and there." Shade nodded and took off.

They began the trek across the streets, but as soon as they left their cover they realized they were making a mistake. The horde wasn't gone, there was just a break in it; close by were even more zombies.

"Shit!" Joey exclaimed.

"Come on, hurry!" Brian urged.

They walked much more quickly, but by the time they had made it to the Cumby's parking lot and gas station, they realized they couldn't get across in time. They had to hide as quickly as they could

Matt saw a ruined car right next to him and dove under it. He squeezed himself in as tightly as he could, and kept a firm grip on his gun. The others followed suit. Soon, they were all underneath cars, and the first of the zombies arrived.

Matt held his breath and gripped his gun as tight as he could in terror. The only thing louder than the zombies' inhuman moans and shambling footsteps seemed to be the sound of his rapidly beating heart. He felt for sure that it would give him away, and that the zombies would find him, and bite him and tear him-

But they didn't find him. They just kept coming and coming. The horde seemed to be infinite; minutes passed, and more and more zombies shamled by, moaning, searching for food. Searching for them.

After what seemed like hours, Matt risked a look around. He spotted Ben, Trent, and Joey hiding under cars. But he couldn't see Brian. _He's probably behind something_, he thought. _Yeah, that's it. If he had been attacked, we would've heard something._

Stillâ€¦

Matt pushed the thought away. There was nothing he could do now. If something had happened to Brian, he was dead. It sucked, but there was nothing he could do.

He slowly turned his head backwards. All he saw was more zombies coming up the street. But they seemed to be thinning out a little bit.

And then, he saw it. Down the street, just at the end of his vision, he saw it; the end of the horde. Before he knew what he was doing, he let out a loud sigh of relief. When he realized how disastrously stupid that was, he held his breath, and kept as still as

possible.

Luckily for him, the zombies hadn't noticed.

He let his breath out- slowly and quietly this time. It looked like they were going to get out alive.

And then, Brian started screaming.

Before Matt even knew what was happening, gunfire exploded across the gas station. Zombie heads burst, and bodies fell to the ground in splatters of blood. He saw Ben, Trent, and Joey crawling out of their hiding places, shooting at the zombies.

"So much for stealth," he muttered to himself. He crawled out of the car and immediately joined the fight.

In the distance, he heard a deafening roar. He risked a quick look to the sky, and saw a black shape shooting towards them. Shade was coming to their rescue.

He then realized that the gas station was probably the worst possible spot for them to be in. If they got clear of it, however, Shade would be able to blow the zombies to hell and beyond.

"Get away from the gas!" he yelled. "Hurry!"

He started running in the direction of the school. Behind him, Ben and Trent were running as fast as they could, shooting zombies over their shoulders. A little ways back, Joey was running and supporting Brian at the same time. Brian was covered in blood, though whose blood Matt could not tell.

As soon as they got out of range, a high-pitched ballistic noise filled the air. A large black shape flashed across his vision, and for a split second, a ball of light hung in the air.

Then, the gas station was ripped apart by a gigantic explosion. Burning cars and pieces of pump mechanism flew everywhere. The windows of Cumberland Farms shattered, and some of the walls collapsed from the impact of flying objects. Best of all, burning zombie chunks were raining from the sky.

"Point for Shade!" Ben yelled.

Matt kept running. Ahead of him was a small mob of zombies, blocking his path. He stopped and looked around, trying to find another way. Then, behind him, a burning car was hurtling towards him at fatal speeds.

He took another look around and realized he wouldn't be able to escape in time. He turned to face the car, and braced himself, readying his mind and body for the killing blow.

The car was twenty feet in front of him, and time seemed to slow. It was only a second away. Later, when he reflected on this moment, Matt sometimes had doubts, but deep in his heart, he knew that somehow, what he had seen was real.

In that one second, and just for that one second, he saw a strange,

hooded figure in the woods. It was dressed entirely in black clothes that concealed even its face. Despite this, Matt somehow knew with absolute certainty that the figure was looking right at him. Then, he felt claws digging into his backpack, and he was lifted off the ground. The burning car flew by underneath him, and plowed into the zombies, crushing them with a sickening squelch.

Matt looked into the forest. The black figure was gone.

Shade flew Matt to the school. There were three buildings; the high school, a wide but single-story building tan in color; the Performing Arts Center; a smaller two-story building that was painted gray, and the Middle School, which was a lot like the High school. In front was a large parking lot and behind it was a massive field.

There were no zombies in the parking lot, so Shade dropped him off there. The Night Fury landed next to him, and looked at him in concern, letting out a quiet warble.

"Thanks," said Matt. He stepped forward and hugged Shade's neck. "Thanks a lot. I thought I was done for."

He felt Shade wrap his legs around his back, hugging him back, and realized that the dragon thought the same thing.

Matt broke off. "Okay, now go get the others. Quickly."

Shade flew away, and returned a minute later with Trent. He left again, leaving the two of them alone.

"What the hell happened?" Matt asked.

"I have no idea," said Trent. "One minute everything was quiet, and then suddenly the zombies were all over Brian."

Matt remembered all the blood that Brian had been covered in. "Is he okay?" he asked.

"I don't know," Trent replied. They listened for a moment, and heard shooting and yelling in the distance.

"It sounds like at least one of them is still alive," Matt observed.

Just then, Shade returned with Ben. He dropped him on the ground, and then flew off to get Brian and Joey.

"Ben!" Matt exclaimed. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he said, falling to his knees. "I just need to rest for a second."

They stood there in silence, waiting for Shade to return. The gunfire had stopped. Matt didn't know whether to take that as a good sign or a bad one.

Then, Shade returned for the last time. This time, he had managed to pick up both Brian and Joey. He dropped them to the ground, and then landed next to Matt.

Joey fell to his knees, and breathed for a moment. Then, he ran over to Ben and punched him square in the nose, breaking it.

"What the fuck?!" Ben yelled, his hands clutching his now heavily bleeding face.

"You little cocksucker!" Joey shouted.

"What the hell did I do?!"

"If you hadn't burned down my house, none of this would've happened!"

"Guys," Brian said weakly.

Joey and Ben didn't hear him. They kept arguing.

"Guys!" Brian yelled.

They both stopped and turned to Brian. His hand was clutching his arm, and his clothes were soaked in blood.

"Help me!" he trailed off, and fell to the ground, unconscious.

"Brian!" they exclaimed. They ran over to him and turned him over, and then froze in place, shocked at what they saw.

"God help us," said Trent.

"Brian!" No!" said Joey, horrified.

When they had turned him over, his hand had fallen away from his arm. When it did, it had uncovered a huge, bleeding zombie bite.

* * *

><p>So, how about that cliffhanger? Anyway, next chapter next week!

10. Chapter Nine: Aperture

Alright, here's another chapter! And something at least some of you have been waiting a while for is finally going to happen...

Warning: From here on out, this story gets _really_ weird.

Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Portal.

* * *

><p>Chapter Nine:

Aperture

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

****Time since infection: 45 minutes****

About half an hour had passed since they had discovered Brian's bite. Quickly, they had performed First Aid to stop the bleeding, and had cleared out as much the high school as they could. They were currently barricaded in Room 611. Brian was still unconscious, but he was alive.

After they had arrived, they had pushed some tables that were in the room in front of the door, holding it shut. Now, they were sitting at the other tables, silently pondering what they were going to do. Joey and Matt were both listening to music quietly. Ben was as well, but he was only using one headphone. Shade was lying on the floor next to Matt, sleeping. Trent was looking through some files on his flash drive.

They all knew that Brian would die. There was no denying it. Nobody ever survived the zombie pathogen. However, Trent remembered something he had read in the flash drive a while ago; something that might save Brian.

Ben got up and walked over to him, holding an ice pack to his bloody, broken nose. "What are you doing?" he asked, his voice nasally from his nose wound.

"Looking for something," Trent replied. "I remember reading it in a report somewhereâ€¦ I can't remember which file it was in, thoughâ€¦"

He opened another file and read it. "Here it is!" He exclaimed.

The report read:

June 23rd, 2013

The cure for the Z-Pathogen has been successfully developed. As of now, only three doses are currently in existence. The team responsible is currently studying the side effects of the cure in their underground laboratory beneath the city of Manchester, New Hampshire. Possibly the most important detail that the team uncovered was that the cure only works before the subject has been infected for 22 hours. After that mark, the cure rate is 0%. So far, 90% of the test subjects, excluding those that were administered the cure after the 22 hour mark, have reported no traces of the Pathogen left in their bodies. For the other 10%, the "cure" only quickens the effects of the disease. The team is currently attempting to fix this setback.

"Oh my Godâ€¦" Ben breathed. "They were making cures?"

"Looks like," said Trent. "The Pathogen existed for at least a year before Z-Day. From what I'm getting, they thought that since it was reanimating dead bodies, than maybe they could figure out how to bring the dead back to life- actual life, not zombie life- by studying it. They were developing the cure in case the pathogen escaped. The problem is, these reports can get incredibly vague. It never even says who was writing them."

"This could be what you've been looking for!" Ben exclaimed

"It could save Brian," Trent agreed. "But no, it's not _that_ cure. And let me show you why."

Trent clicked through more reports. For a while, none of them were relevant to his interests, but after a while he found another one.

July 7th, 2013

The team in Manchester has given another report. They still have been unable to determine all of the possible side effects, and haven't yet developed a solution to the 10% fatality problem. This may be in part due to their computer. They have reported that their AI has been acting very strangely, and has hindered their progress. Despite this, more cures have been made, and they report 10 currently in existence.

.

"I still don't understand," said Ben.

"Well, let's read the next report," Trent replied. A few reports later, they found further mention of the cure

July 9th, 2013

A disturbing occurrence has come to our attention. The team in Manchester has completely ceased communication with the outside world. It could just be a communications failure, or something much worse. Judging by how much they've been working with the Z-Pathogen, these tidings are very disturbing. If something happened to them, it would not be catastrophic; we have the machine in New Hampshire as well. Still, it would be a great loss. A team has been sent in to investigate.

"I think I understand now," said Ben. "They made some cures, but were never able to make more?"

"I think that's just about right," said Trent.

"And that Machine it mentionedâ€¦| Do you think that's the solution you're looking for?"

"It's the only lead I've got so far. Now, there was one moreâ€¦|"

Trent read through some more reports, and found another.

July 11th, 2013

The team sent to the Manchester laboratory has not yet returned. We fear the worst, and unless they come back, we will write them off as dead and declare the laboratory off-limits. The research can continue without them.

"So we have to find this lab," Ben concluded.

"Exactly," said Trent. "There's no guarantee that there will be any

cures left, but it's worth a try. Go and tell the others; I need to find some more info about this place."

Ben went to inform the others of Trent's plan, while Trent himself did some more research. He found some files about the lab and read through them, writing down the information he needed on a piece of paper. When he was done, Ben rounded the others up so Trent could explain his plan. "Okay," he said. "We can save Brian. But we'll need to split up. Shade, we need to get there as quickly as we can, so that means you're coming. We're going to have to get this done in 21 hours. Can you do that?"

Shade nodded.

"Good. Matt, you're coming too."

"Okay," Matt replied.

"Ben, Joey, I need you two to stay here and guard Brian and our supplies."

"Butâ€¦ But why do I have to stay? I helped make this plan!" Ben protested.

"No, you just heard it before everyone else," said Trent. "I'm sorry, but you need to stay."

"Butâ€¦ Fine."

"Alright, let's go."

****Time since infection: 2 hours and 15 minutes****

They had left a half hour later, and had been flying for almost an hour since.

Shade was holding up very well, considering this was his first long-distance flight since his accident. They were almost there, and his wings had only developed a dull ache. Matt sat in front, holding onto Shade's neck, and Trent sat behind him, holding onto his spines. Both of them carried backpacks with them. They rode mostly in silence, keeping to their own thoughts.

Eventually, Matt spoke. "What's the story behind this lab, anyway?" he asked.

"It was another experiment," Trent explained. "At least, that's how it started out. They wanted to see how one of their labs would function under the supervision of Artificial Intelligence. For years, it proved to be a success, and they even duplicated the experiment, until the incident happened. After that, all other AI systems in the United States were shut down."

"Do you think the AI is still functioning?" Matt asked.

"I don't know," said Trent. "If the theories about it are trueâ€¦ I hope to God not."

****Time since infection: 2 hours and 45 minutes****

They landed on the outskirts of Manchester. Trent directed them to a landing spot, where Shade touched down. They slid off of the dragon. "Follow me," said Trent.

He led them through a forest outside the city. After a few minutes, they came across a clearing with an old, abandoned shack.

"Is this it?" Matt asked. "They really let this place go."

"Oh, you'll change your mind once we get in," Trent replied.

Shade was sniffing the ground, curiously at first. He detected the smell of the lab, very faint, but there. Memories of his horrible life in the lab resurfaced; memories of being abused, violated, and treated like an object by the horrible overseers.

He pushed the memories from his head. There would be none of that waiting for him in there. But he still didn't want to go in.

And then, another scent caught his attention. A much fresher scent. A human had passed through here very recently. Sniffing further, Shade realized that he or she had in fact gone _into _the shack. Someone was in the laboratory.

They were two other scents as well; ones he didn't recognize.

And then, he smelled a fourth scent. One he _did _recognize.

Noâ€| he thought. _It can't beâ€| can it?_

He growled in warning. Matt heard him and turned. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Shade just stared into the warehouse.

"Is something in there?"

Shade nodded.

"Well, we have to go in anyway," said Trent. "We can't just let Brian die. Whoever's in there is someone we'll have to face."

They entered the warehouse to find it completely empty. "I don't see any lab," said Matt.

"Hold on," said Trent. He searched around the floorboards, eventually finding something. He dug his fingers into a crack in the floor and lifted a whole section up, revealing an unlit metal staircase just big enough for them all to fit into. It descended far into darkness, and they couldn't see the end.

"Let's go," said Trent.

They walked down the stairs, Trent taking the lead. Eventually, the light from above stopped illuminating the path ahead. Trent pulled out a flashlight, turned it on, and they continued.

When they finally reached the bottom of their dark descent, Trent shone his light on a big steel doorway. There was no handle; only a keypad with a blue LED light.

"The light's on. Looks like the power's still on in there," said Trent. "That means the AI might still be online as well."

"Great," said Matt, drawing his gun. "Let's just get this over with."

Trent punched in a six-digit password, and the LED light switched to green. The door slid open to reveal a brightly lit passageway. The walls were made of the same pale stone as the stairway, but under the lights they seemed much more inviting. They stepped through the door, and it slid shut behind them.

They walked down the hallway towards another descending staircase. Shade fell behind, sniffing the floor nervously. They reached the staircase and looked down, discovering that it led to another steel door. This one was different from the first in that it was curved inwards, and words were imprinted on the door; _Welcome to Aperture Laboratories._

"What theâ€¦" Matt trailed off in disbelief.

"Fun fact: the company Valve was secretly owned by whoever it was that ran this whole operation. The facility in the games _Portal_ and _Portal 2_ was based off of this laboratory. It was used to fund their research and dispel rumors."

"I've played those gamesâ€¦ Does that mean I was funding their research?" Matt asked.

"Yep. The exact same genetic engineering that resulted in the zombie pathogen."

"Wow. I hate myself."

They approached the door and pressed a button on the wall next to it. It slid open to reveal an elevator. The elevator's cabin was cylindrical, and its walls were made of smooth, polished steel. Bright lights in the ceiling gleamed off the side, giving the interior an almost glowing aura.

"After you," said Trent.

Matt stepped in the elevator, and Trent and Shade followed. The elevator door slid shut automatically, and they started their descent.

"This is impressive," Matt admitted.

"Yeah," Trent agreed. "Wait until you see the rest. The report says this place is massive."

"How are we going to find the cure in time if it's that big?"

"Well, there's one room in particular that I think can help. It's one of many that hold back-ups for all the data in the lab in case of accidental erasure. If we can find that, we might be able to use the information there to find the cure."

"Do you know where it is?"

"I have an idea."

"Good. Let's get there quickly; this place is giving me the creeps."

After a few more seconds, the elevator shuddered to a stop, and the door slid open. They stepped out and found themselves in a lobby-like room, with desk in the middle. Three hallways intersected in the room. The walls were all smooth, unblemished white, with bright lights in the middle that made them almost blinding.

"Which way?" Matt asked.

Trent pointed over the desk. "That way," he said. He led their passage forward, and Matt and Shade followed behind.

Shade was still sniffing the ground. The scent was unmistakable now. He knew what it was, and it worried him. He walked up to Matt and nudged his head. Matt turned around to face him. "What?" he asked.

Shade looked at him anxiously.

"What?" Matt asked again. "What's wrong?"

Shade sniffed the ground, and then looked back at him.

"What do you smell?" Matt asked. "Is someone down here with us?"

Shade nodded.

"All the more reason to find this place," said Trent. "If someone's down here with us, they could be anywhere at any time. We'd have no way of knowing if they're all the way on the other side or right around the corner."

A sudden wave of paranoia swept through Matt's chest. He took a deep breath, and said, "Let's just find this cure and get out of here before we run into them."

They continued forward. Trent took a piece of paper out of his backpack and studied it.

"What's that?" Matt asked.

"Directions," Trent replied.

"Thank God."

As they made their way through the facility, Matt grew increasingly paranoid. Every time they turned a corner, he felt with certainty that they would run into someone- or something- that would instantly kill them.

Matt glanced at Shade. Even the dragon was much edgier than usual. Just a normal, everyday human being wouldn't do that to him. It had to be something else. This knowledge only managed to increase his paranoia; before he was scared, but now he was downright terrified.

Every shadow hid a monster, and every creak was the sound of an enemy ready to attack.

Trent suddenly stiffened. "You hear that?" he whispered.

"Hear what?"

He slowly approached the corner, being careful not to make any sudden noises. Matt held his breath, his heart pounding. Slowly, he stuck his gun around the corner, and then jumped out, aiming it at the same time.

"Oh my God!" He yelled in terror, shooting his pistol.

Without even thinking, Matt sprang around the corner, his eyes closed, instinctively firing his weapon at whoever- or whatever- it was that had threatened Trent.

After he had unloaded a whole clip, he paused to reload. At the same time, he opened his eyes to see exactly what he had been shooting at.

Nothing.

Behind him, Trent was roaring with laughter.

"Oh my God," he breathed hysterically. "Oh my God. You should've seen the look on your face!

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" Matt exclaimed. "That was a dick thing to do!"

"I'm sorry, I just couldn't help it!" Trent gasped through bouts of laughter.

Shade's ears were flattened against his head. He was not amused.

Matt walked over to him and shoved him backwards. "Go to hell," he said, and kept walking.

"Oh come on!" Trent protested. "It was just a joke!"

Shade walked by him, flicking him in the face with his ear and slapping him with his tail.

"Ow!"

****Time since infection: 2 hours and 45 minutes****

After several more minutes of searching, they finally found the room they were looking for.

"Here it is," said Trent, approaching another steel door.

"Thank God," Matt said, relieved that they had found it without running into trouble.

"Don't be celebrating just yet," said Trent. "We still have to find the cure, and make our way back without running into

trouble."

"Great. Be a buzz kill, why don't ya?"

Trent pressed a button on the wall next to the door to open it. They stepped through the threshold into a large room filled with computers and databases.

"Soâ€¦ Now what?" Matt asked.

"Well, let's try one of these computers," he suggested. He walked towards the back of the room and pressed the power button on one of them. It sprang to life, and a loading screen appeared. "Looks like it works," he said. "Now, you try to find information on here, and I'll look on another."

Trent went to another computer and turned it on. Meanwhile, Shade was still sniffing the floor. The scents had gotten stronger and fresher. After a few more sniffs, he picked up on a trail leading through the room. He followed the trail with his eyes to a door marked "Storage." The scents from that door were the strongest he had smelled yet.

They're in there, he thought. _And they're not alone. Oh noâ€¦!_

He stared intensely at the door. Trent noticed him, and walked over. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Shade let out a warning growl, still staring at the door.

"What's in there?" He asked.

Shade growled again.

Trent tried to take a step forward, but Shade snapped his wing out in front of him, holding him back.

"Is someone in there?" he asked, quietly.

Shade nodded.

Trent stared at the door. Without taking his eyes off of it, he called to Matt. "Hey!"

"What's up?" Matt asked.

"I think someone's-"

He was cut off, as the door opened in front of him. A human hand appeared, and threw something small and spherical into the room with them. It landed on the ground next to Trent, and he backed off in panic.

"Grenade!" He yelled. "Get down!"

Matt turned around and shielded himself with his arms, at the same time staring nervously at the grenade on the floor. Shade and Trent backed off as fast as they could.

The grenade exploded, and produced a flash of light so bright that it

burned itself over their vision. It was all that Matt could see. Beneath the ringing in his ears caused by the explosion, he heard several footsteps running through the room. He was able to count at least three different sets of feet. They went from the Storage room to the door that he, Trent and Shade had entered from. But not all of them. One of them stopped near Shade.

He heard Shade whimper in fear. _Someone's got him_, he thought. He tried to crawl in his friend's direction, but he knew he wouldn't make it in time. He opened his mouth to say something, but before he could, a male voice- neither his nor Trent's- sounded through the room.

"No!"

The entire room went silent. Matt still couldn't see anything, only hear. His heart pounded.

Pleaseâ€¦| Not Shadeâ€¦|

"Leave him," the voice said again.

For what felt like hours- but was in reality only a few seconds- nothing happened. And then, heavy footsteps moved towards the door and into the hallway.

Matt's vision was finally starting to clear. He stood up, and was able to catch a glimpse of someone running down the hallway, before the door slid shut.

Shaking, he ran over to Shade and helped him up. "What happened?" he asked to anyone who would answer.

"That bastard- whoever he was- had a flash bang," Trent replied.

"Jesus," said Matt, shakily. "Are you okay?" he asked Shade.

Shade nodded; he was just shaken up.

"You sure?"

Shade nodded again and stood up.

"Okay." Matt ran to the Storage door and peered in, making sure it was empty. He found nothing inside but old computers and various wires.

He turned back to Trent and said, "Let's find this cure and get the fuck out of here"

As quickly as they could, they activated computer after computer, running searches and looking for the cure. Shade kept guard at the door. It wasn't long before they found results.

"I think I found it!" Matt exclaimed. He opened the file and skimmed through it. "Yes, it's here!"

Trent ran over to him. "Where is it?" he asked.

"The Containment Center in the West Wing," Matt replied. "Do you know where that is?"

"Noâ€| but I know which way is West."

"Okay then, let's go."

He reached to power down the computer, when suddenly another voice filled the room.

"You people really are idiots, you know that?"

It was the voice that had spoken out earlier. Matt jumped in fright. When he turned around and saw no one, he yelled, "Where are you?"

No response.

"Can you hear me?" the voice asked.

It was coming from a speaker implanted in the wall, with a button next to it. Trent ran over and pushed the button. "Who the fuck is this?" he demanded.

"Honestly, that doesn't matter," the man on the other end said. "What matters is that you and your friends just walked right into a death trap."

"What are you talking about?"

"She's still here," the voice replied. "She's always been here. Ever since she wiped out the scientists, she's been watching over this place."

"Who?" Trent asked. "Who is she?"

The man ignored his question. "She tolerates meâ€| I won't go into whyâ€| But she'll kill you. Maybe not right away, but she'll do it. She's probably watching you right now."

Something about this adversary's voice was bothering him. It felt so familiar, yet because of the diminished quality of the speaker he couldn't put his finger on who it was.

"Who is it?!" Trent yelled.

"It really is a shame," said the man. "You've got a really nice Night Fury with you. A tragic waste of life. I'd try to get him out, but I know he'd never come. Night Furies are too loyal for that."

Shade growled at that.

"Listen, you dickhead!" Trent yelled. "You tell us what's going on right now!"

"I'm sorry, but I really must be going," said the man. "I wish I could help you- I really do- but I made a deal with her."

"Don't you dare leave."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Another voice filled the room from an intercom near the ceiling. It was computerized, and female.

Matt's heart skipped a beat. He _definitely _knew that voiceâ€¦ It was unmistakable. _Noâ€¦ Please let this be a dream._

_"I've been watching you three," _said the voice. _"Normally I would've acted sooner, butâ€¦ I couldn't resist seeing that confrontation."_

"Let us out. Now!" Trent demanded.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said the voice. _"I have my needs, you see. And you were dumb enough to walk right in here."_

"I swear to God, when I get my hands on youâ€¦"

"Oh, but you won't."

At that, a clunking noise came from the doors, and a hissing noise filled the room.

"All exits to the room have been sealed. As we speak, the air around you is being filled with a special toxin."

"Noâ€¦ Pleaseâ€¦" Matt begged.

"I'd say you have about two minutes. Three for the dragon."

"You bitch!" Matt yelled, tears of fear and rage welling in his eyes.

"I've never tested a dragon before. I'm greatly looking forward to it."

Shade growled ferociously.

Trent pressed the button on the speaker again. "Listen you bastard!" he yelled. "Don't leave a fellow human to die! There are already too little of us left!"

"It's too late. He already left."

"Please let us go," Matt begged. "We have a friend. He's infected, and he'll die if we don't get him the cure."

_"That is not my problem. The infected do not concern me in the least. They cannot get in, and even if they could they would be a quick fix. The Pathogen is contained so well that the only way to release it is to kill me. And even _that's _not guaranteed."_

"You heartless bitch!"

Trent, howling in anger, picked up a computer and smashed it against the door. It did absolutely nothing, so he tried another one. And another one.

"Stop that! Those are important!"

"I don't care!" Trent yelled.

"You're only making it worse for yourself. The more active you are, the quicker the toxin will take effect."

"I don't give a shit! I'm going to die anyway!"

Matt and Shade just stood there, watching, unsure what to do. A minute passed, and Matt started to feel weak.

Trent was affected much quicker by the toxin. He was still smashing computers against the door, but his movements were now much weaker. Soon, he was barely able to walk. Finally, he collapsed to his knees, gasping.

"No!" he said, before he fell over, unconscious.

Matt, who had been leaning against a table this whole time, attempted to go to him. However, he had grown too weak. He collapsed to the floor and started crawling forward. He knew he wouldn't make it to Trent, so he changed direction to Shade. The dragon met his eyes. In that one look, they connected. They knew exactly what the other was feeling.

Matt continued to crawl forward, but eventually lost all the strength to do even that. He reached his arm out. "Shade!" he said weakly.

Shade walked over to him, his eyes full of agony. He nudged Matt's head, whimpering.

"Shade! I'm sorry!"

Those were his last words. With one final glance at his best friend's face, he was enveloped by darkness.

"No!" Shade trailed off. "No!" He continuously nudged Matt's body with his head, desperate to wake him up, but nothing worked.

He roared in anger and sorrow, and smashed a computer next to him. He felt himself growing weaker, and eventually couldn't even stand on his own legs. He fell to the floor and remained still, submitting.

A few seconds later, blackness took him.

* * *

><p>So, let me know what you think!

Now, because Chapter Ten is so short, I'm going to put up two this week... Chapter Ten will be up on Wednesday, and Chapter Eleven will be up on Sunday!

11. Chapter Ten: The Wait

So, like I said, new chapter on Wednesday!

****Sorry about the length of this one. It's really short. But, on Sunday, we'll get a really long one!****

* * *

><p>Chapter Ten:

****The Wait****

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

****Time since infection: 7 hours****

Six hours had passed since Matt, Trent, and Shade had left to find the cure.

Joey was focusing all of his attention on Brian. He had developed a fever, and his skin was hot to the touch. It was getting steadily worse as the time passed.

"He's getting worse," Joey said to Ben. "They better get back here soon."

Ben was worried. Manchester wasn't really that far away. They were taking a long time to get back. It was possible they had run into some complications, butâ€|

"If they don't get back soonâ€| I don't know if they'll come back at all," said Ben.

****Time since infection: 8 hours****

Seven hours had passed.

Ben was willing to give it more time, but the horror of the situation was finally starting to sink in. They were stuck here, in a classroom, with their infected friend. Time was running out, and it was looking to him like the only people who _might _be able to help wouldn't be coming back.

"Joeyâ€|" he said. "They've been gone a whileâ€|"

"They'll be back," Joey insisted. "The laboratory must be big. They're having a hard time finding the cure, that's all."

Ben sighed. "Look," he said. "I know you don't want to lose Brian. But if they don't come back, there's nothing we can do. And there's nothing we can do to help them either. We are completely helpless right now." He paused, and then added, "I know that doesn't seem very comforting, but it's the truth."

"You know what?" Joey asked. "Go to hell. This is your fault. So shut the fuck up."

"You don't think I feel bad?!" Ben exclaimed. "I've felt nothing but guilt ever since the fire! But feeling bad isn't going to change any of this! It's all up to them now; if they don't get back, Brian's going to die! And if you won't accept that, then someone has too!"

With one movement, Joey pulled out his gun and cocked it, pointing it at Ben. "Oh yeah?" He said. "Well if Brian dies, his blood is on your hands. Give me one reason I shouldn't kill you."

Slowly, Ben lifted his hands above his head. "You wouldn't," he said.

"Try me."

Neither of them spoke a word for a minute. They stood there, staring at each other. Finally, Joey dropped his arm slightly and fired a bullet at the floor right between Ben's feet.

Ben jumped back, startled. "Jesus!" he yelled. "What the hell?!"

"Don't talk to me," Joey replied.

****Time since infection: 9 hours****

They're coming back, Joey thought. _They have tooâ€| Brian can't die._

No matter how much he tried to convince himself, however, he couldn't shake the feeling that the others were in trouble.

Maybe Ben is right, he thought. He cast the thought away. _No. He's wrong. He has to be. They'll be backâ€|_

"Look," said Ben, breaking the silence once more. "I'm starving. We need food and warmth. I'm going to go find some fire wood, okay?"

"Whatever," said Joey.

"If I'm not back in a half hour, I'm probably dead."

****Time since infection: 10 hours****

An hour later, the two of them were sitting around a roaring fire, eating sandwiches. They ate in silence; neither of them wanting to say what the other was thinking.

There could be no denying it now. Matt, Trent, and Shade weren't back yet. Most likely they wouldn't be coming back at all.

Joey was still holding on to the hope that they would return, but that they had just gotten sidetracked. But Ben wasn't fooling himself. He knew that it was getting more and more unlikely that they would return.

He didn't want to have to kill Brian; the thought sent pangs of anguish through him. But he knew it would have to be done.

God, I need a drink, he thought. He reached into his backpack and pulled out a bottle of beer. _The only one that made it_, he thought. _I'll miss you when you're gone_.

"Oh my God!" Joey exclaimed.

"What?" asked Ben.

"How can you possibly have more alcohol? Are you a wizard or something? Have you been conjuring alcohol?"

Ben couldn't help but chuckle a bit. "No," he replied. "Let's just sayâ€¦ I have my ways."

Joey smirked, and stared off into space. After a few moments, he said, "Lookâ€¦ I'm sorry I pointed my gun at you earlier. It's justâ€¦ Brian's the only one left."

"It's okay," said Ben. "But that's not true. I'm still here."

Joey shook his head. "No," he said. "That's not what I mean. Me and Brianâ€¦ We were part of a team. But the rest of us were killed off quickly. And if Brian dies, wellâ€¦ I'll be the only one leftâ€¦"

Neither of them were sure what to say after that. Finally, Ben said, "It's getting late. You should rest. I'll keep watch, and wake you up in a couple of hours."

****Time since infection: 18 hours and 45 minutes****

"Benâ€¦ Benâ€¦"

Ben opened his eyes to see Joey shaking him awake.

"Whatâ€¦?" he asked, groggily. He sat up in his sleeping bag and put his glasses on.

"I'm going to go get some more wood," he said. "It's breakfast time."

"Okay," said Ben. "Did the others come back yet?"

Joey froze. "No," he said, his voice cold. "If I'm not back in a half hour, you know what happened."

"Okay," said Ben.

Grief began working its way through his mind, taking over. It had been almost a whole day, and the others weren't back yet. There was only one likely explanation; they weren't coming back, and that meant Brian was as good as dead.

He went over to Brian. The fever had gotten worse- much worse. He was pale and clammy, and he had lost weight overnight. He looked like a corpse, and the only thing that indicated anything different was the ragged, infrequent rise and fall of his chest.

"Ben!" Joey exclaimed behind him.

Ben jumped. Joey had startled him; he hadn't expected him back for another ten minutes at least.

"What?" he asked, gasping.

"You need to see this. It's bad. Really bad."

Joey led Ben out of the room. When Ben turned to block up the door behind them, Joey stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "We've got bigger problems right now," he said.

They got to the front of the school, and saw something that made Ben's blood run cold. In front of the school was a gigantic zombie horde.

"I don't know if they know we're here," said Joey. "But they seem alert. What should we do?"

Ben closed his eyes and took a deep breath, thinking. "We're going to search all the rooms for ammo. We need as much as we can get. Even if we have to go to the PAC and the middle school. Then, we're going to get Brian to a safe place." He paused for a moment, and then added, "Brace yourself. Shit's about to get real."

* * *

><p>I think I'm actually going to keep this up... I've been putting this out really slowly, and we've got a lot of material to cover in this story. So, for now, expect new chapters on Wednesdays as well!**

Anyway, let me know what you think! And see you on Sunday!

12. Chapter Eleven: Still Alive

So, here's the next chapter! I'm a bit unsure how I feel about this one. There's a lot of great stuff in it, but other parts feel really confused and hard to understand... Still, I hope you like it.

Disclaimer: I do not own Portal or HTTYD

* * *

><p>Chapter Eleven:

Still Alive

Location unknown

Time since infection: Unknown

Matt awoke to a loud, rumbling noise.

He sat up, rubbing sleep out of his eyes. _What the hell happened?
_He wondered.

He looked at his surroundings, and found himself to be sitting in a metal cell, with nothing but an uncomfortable bed, a latrine, and a sink to accompany him. There were no windows, and only a dim light coming from the ceiling. He felt as if the floor was moving, yet everything in the room was completely still.

_Where am I? _ He reached into his mind, trying to remember what had happened. The memories came rushing back to him.

"Oh no!" he thought aloud. "Oh God!"

How am I still alive?

He got out of bed, walked over to the sink, and turned the knob. Cool water flowed from the faucet and into the basin. As he splashed it over his face, he tried to think.

Shade! Trent! God, please let them be okay.

How much time had passed? Was Brian still alive? Matt tried to think it over, but he had no way of knowing. It could've been an hour, a day, a week, or even a month.

He looked around, searching for an escape from this confinement. Just faintly visible, almost completely blending in with the wall, was a door. But there was no handle, and he highly doubted it was unlocked.

Thinking back again, he remembered the voices. He couldn't think of who the first one might have belonged to, although there was something stirring in the back of his mind at the memory. He knew the voice from somewhere. In fact, he was certain that he would have recognized the voice if the intercom had been in better shape.

The other voice, well, he knew who that belonged to. It hadn't been a human voice; it was computerized, and could only be the AI.

"Good. You're awake." _The sound of the AI's voice filled the room.

"Where are my friends?" Matt demanded.

"Don't worry about them; they're alive. For now. And you'll stay alive as well, provided you cooperate."_

"Fine. Where am I?"

"You are in your cell in Aperture Laboratories, and are currently being transported across the laboratory to your testing site."_

_So the whole testing thing was real! _ Matt thought in dismay.

"Is your name GLaDOS?" he asked.

"Yes," _the AI responded. _"How did you know?"_

"I've heard of you before," Matt replied. "I didn't think you were real."

"Well, surprise. I am. And I assume that since you know who I am, you also know what I want from you?"_

"Testing?"

"You are correct."_

_Shit! _Matt thought. "How long have I been out?" he asked.

_ "I fail to see how that matters," _GLaDOS replied. _ "If you are worried about your friend, let me help you put that worry aside. You will not be able to help them, no matter how long it has been. You will not escape. You will remain here for the rest of your life, no matter how long that is. Now, I must attend to other matters. I will return when you have arrived at your testing station." _

"Wait!" Matt demanded. But it was too late. She was gone.

He turned around and kicked his bed in frustration. "Shit!" he exclaimed.

He thought back to the _Portal_ games. He didn't know if the tests would have portal guns- in fact, he highly doubted it- but if the tests were anything like those in the games, they would be dangerous- very dangerous, and if he survived the tests, he would probably die anyway. GLaDOS was known for killing her test subjects when she had no further use of them.

Meanwhile, in another cell elsewhere in the laboratories, Trent was waking up.

"Damnâ€¦|" he groaned to himself, his head aching. "What happened?" Opening his eyes, he sat up and gripped his head in his hands.

He was in a small metal cell, which was empty except for a small, uncomfortable bed, a toilet, and a sink. There was no telling where- or when- he was.

The memories rushed back to him. It was only then that he realized the full urgency of the situation.

_ Jesusâ€¦| _he thought. _ I can't believe I survived that._

One by one, questions rushed through his head. Where was he? How did he get here? How had he survived the toxin? Who was the man who ambushed them? Where was he? Who was the woman who had gassed them? Where were Matt and Shade? Were they okay?

Another memory came back to him; Brian.

"My God!" He cursed. "How long have I been out? Shit!"

He couldn't think straight. His headache was flaring through his thoughts. "Ahhhh! God damn it!" He clutched his head in agony.

_ Now I know how Ben feels, _he thought.

_ "Ah. You're awake." _

_ Oh no. Her again._

"What the hell did you do to me?" he demanded. "And where are my friends?"

_ "Your friends are safe. And you are too, as long as you cooperate. I gassed you with a powerful, yet non-lethal toxin. You were knocked out, and I had you transported here." _

"Who are you?" Trent demanded.

"My name is GLaDOS. I run this facility, and you are now under my control."

"I'm not doing anything you say."

"That's a shame. Your friends had such testing potential. Oh well. I'm sure I can find some use for their bodies."

Trent stood up suddenly, fury coursing through him. "Don't you dare kill them!" he yelled. "I'll kill- Ow!"

His headache flared up and cut him off. This made him lose his footing, and he fell to the bed, clutching his head in agony.

"Don't worry. I won't kill your friends. If, that is, you cooperate."

"Fine," said Trent through gritted teeth. "I'll do whatever you say. Just don't hurt them."

"Okay. I'm glad we've reached an understanding. By the way, I'm sorry about that headache. The toxin has several possible side-affects. Would you like something to help?"

"Sure, whatever."

A hissing noise filled the room. _"I am currently dispensing a gas that should relieve the pain."_

Trent said nothing. He just waited there, breathing in deeply. After about a minute, the headache started receding.

"Thanks," he said.

"You're welcome. Now, I will transport you to your testing station."

The floor gave a shudder, and the whole room started to move. As to where, Trent couldn't say.

"Now, before we get started, there's one more thing I must deal with."

Shade awoke in darkness. Not a fearsome darkness, but a comforting darkness. It relaxed him, and seemed to soothe his very essence. He let himself lie there, resting, and let the darkness flow over him.

He became aware of a humming, rumbling noise. It was faint at first, but it grew louder and closer with every passing second. Eventually, it cut through the darkness, and shattered the world around him.

He opened his eyes.

Fatigue hit him like a wall. He could barely keep his eyes open. Gathering all of his strength, he tried to stand up. It took all of his strength just to hold himself up in a crouch for just a brief

moment. His strength gave out, and he collapsed to the floor.

What happenedâ€|?

In much the same way that they had to his friends, the memories came back to him in a rush. He too was shocked that he was still alive.

That voiceâ€| That woman. When I get my claws on herâ€|

But something inside him told him that he wouldn't. Had Matt and Trent not been talking about an AI? The voice hadn't been human, he could tell that much. But it had been speaking in a human tongue. There was no other logical explanation.

_Where am I? _he wondered.

The Night Fury struggled to lift his head. Briefly, he examined his surroundings. He found himself to be curled up in the corner of a large, metal, and completely empty cell. He was alone.

Where is everyone?

His head fell to the ground, as he did not have the strength to hold it up. He couldn't understand why he was so weak.

_It must be that toxinâ€| _he thought. Then, with horror, he came to a realization.

Being a dragon, he was much stronger than Matt and Trent. If the toxin had reduced him to this state, the odds of them having survived were extremely low.

He felt himself begin to panic. _Control yourself! _He thought. _You're in shock. They could be still alive. After all, maybe the toxin wasn't supposed to kill. Maybe it does this to everyone it's exposed to, regardless of strength or size._

He managed to calm himself. Taking a deep breath, he tried to stand up again, but his legs gave out and he fell back to the ground. He growled in frustration.

_"Ah. Look who's joining the party," _said the voice.

_Oh no. Not _her _again, _Shade thought. He tried to stand up, growling while he was at it, but collapsed again.

_No need to be so hostile," _the voice said. _"And sorry about that. The toxin has several possible side-affects. Let me help."_

A hissing noise, much like the one the toxin had made, filled the room. Shade tried to retreat into his corner, but he still couldn't move.

His first thought was that the AI was trying to finish the job. But after several seconds, he realized this wasn't the case, as he started feeling his strength coming back. Lifting his head, he realized he could hold it up with no problem. After a minute, he tried to stand up again. Legs trembling from the effort, he was able to stay on his feet. After another minute, his strength was almost

entirely back.

Now that the fatigue was gone, he felt like he had been shoved in a box two sizes too small for three weeks straight. _For all I know, I have_, he thought.

His muscles were stiff, and he had pins and needles in his legs. He stretched his hind legs back, unfurling his wings as much as he could in the process. When he was finished, he switched to his forelegs, and flicked his tail a few times to get the blood flowing.

_"Now then," _said the voice. _"Where were we? Oh, right. I'm sure you have a lot of questions for me, but seeing as you can't verbally communicate with me, I'll give you all the information you'll need. My name is GLaDOS, and I run this facility. Don't worry about your friends, they are still alive. You'll stay alive too, as long as you cooperate. Don't worry about your friend who is infected either. You will not leave this place in time to help them, even if they _are_ still alive. You are here to help the progression of science. Nod if you understand."_

Shade was hit by a wave of emotions. Relief that Matt and Trent were still alive, anger that GLaDOS was holding them against their will, grief as he realized that Brian would die, and then more anger. And then, finally, from a memory of another laboratory much like this one, fear.

"You've got a lot of nerve," he spat. But he realized that he had no choice but to comply. He nodded.

_"Good," _she replied. _"I'm glad we have reached an understanding. You are now being transported to your testing station."_

Several uneventful minutes had passed. Matt was nervously pacing around his cell. The whole situation was a lot for him to comprehend, but he did the best he could to put it out of his mind and focus on the task at hand.

He needed to escape.

He had tried the door, and found no way to get it open. As far as he could tell, there was no way out of the cell at all. He had been looking.

As he was doing this, the cell shuddered to a halt. He stumbled, regained his balance, and waited. After a few moments, the cell lurched, and then began a descent.

"Here we go," he thought out loud.

The cell came to a halt. Matt waited for something- anything to happen. Suddenly, without warning, the walls and ceiling began moving up, leaving Matt and the floor behind.

_"Welcome to the Aperture Science Enrichment Center," _GLaDOS said as the walls lifted.

"Yeah, yeah," Matt replied. "You can skip the introduction. I already know what this place is."

_ "Well, that saves me a long explanation. Thank you." _

"Whatever."

Matt observed as the walls rose to reveal another room. It was completely white, and much bigger than the cell. On the ceiling were bright lights that created a harsh glare. The glare hurt his eyes, and he lifted a hand to shield them.

When they had adjusted to the brightness, he saw that on the other side of the room from him was a door, much like the ones in the laboratory. There was also a large, transparent pipe jutting out of the ceiling, and a large, red button on the floor in the center of the room. He realized one other thing as well: he was still trapped.

Surrounding him on three sides were glass walls, separating him from the rest of the chamber. On the fourth side, behind him, the cell connected with the wall of the larger chamber.

He turned around, faced the exit, and saw something on the wall to his left that hadn't been there before. A large, oval-shaped splotch of glowing, shimmering, orange substance.

_ No way! That's! That's impossible._

_ "The portal will open in three! two! one." _

Suddenly, the center of the orange splotch became transparent. But it wasn't the wall behind it that Matt saw; it was his cell.

He turned to face the wall behind him, and saw a similar looking blue splotch. Through it, he could see everything in the test chamber—including himself.

"No way!" He breathed. "This is impossible! How did you?"

_ "Never underestimate the power of science," _GLaDOS replied.

Cautiously, Matt approached the portal. He reached out his hand, readying himself to touch it. When he did, his hand passed through it as if it weren't even there.

He hesitated for a moment. _ "Oh just go through it already," _said GLaDOS.

Matt braced himself, and stepped through the portal. He felt a moment of disorientation, as he was not only doing it, but also watching himself do it through the portal. He saw himself go through as he was doing it. But other than that, it was just like walking through a doorway.

He knew what to do next. He waited, and sure enough, a large, metallic cube dropped out of the tube protruding from the ceiling. He walked over to it and picked it up. It was heavy, but not too much so. As he set it down on top of the button, he heard the door slide open.

On the other side of the door was a hallway. Towards the end of that hallway, there was a spot where many particles of some kind were flying out of a slit in one wall and into a slit in the other. Beyond that, there was an elevator.

"Note the incandescent particle field across the exit. This Aperture Science material emancipation grid will vaporize any unauthorized equipment that passes through it. For instance, the Aperture Science weighted storage cube.""

"Yeah, yeah," said Matt. He stepped through the field. It felt as if a painless electrical flow ran through his body, but yet he came out unscathed. The elevator door slid open, and he stepped inside.

The doors closed, and the elevator began a rapid ascent. _Jeez, how big is this place? _Matt wondered in awe.

After a few seconds, the elevator slowed to a stop, and the doors slid open again. He stepped out and found himself in another hallway.

"And so it begins," he said to himself.

The lab was stirring up old memories that Shade wished he could forget.

Before Z-Day, while Shade and the other Night Furies had been kept in the laboratory, the scientists had often performed tests on them. They had started testing Shade when he was only a hatchling. Back then, the tests had been merely irritating; response to stimuli, blood samples, etc. The tests weren't the problem. The scientists were.

If a Night Fury ever attacked a scientist, they would be punished. _Very _severely. It was extremely rare, but it happened. Shade couldn't remember any instances, but he had heard stories from before he had been born. The Night Fury in question had never been seen again.

Because of this, the Night Furies had no choice but to submit to the scientists' brutality- even though they knew that they could do something about it. Every once in a while, a scientist would walk in, extremely angry, and would take it out on one of them. Usually, it would only be verbal abuse. But, if they were exceptionally mad- or cruel, they would deny them food or drink for the day. And back then, food was precious. It came few and far between.

Other than the scientists themselves, the Night Furies hated their living conditions. They were kept in small, fireproof cages, and were never allowed out unless they were being tested. They were almost never allowed to fly, even though every fiber of their beings longed to soar. They dreamed of one day escaping the lab, by either breaking out and flying away, or dying. Attempted suicide was not unheard of.

There were times Shade thought that he would go insane if he had to spend another day there. The only reason he didn't had been Ashmore.

Ashmore was the same age as him, and had been kept in the cage next to his. He was a big Night Fury; bigger and stronger than Shade was, and with icy blue eyes instead of the normal green. Ashmore was a strange Night Fury indeed, as there had been something wrong with his fire. Sometimes, it would light wrong. Not fire, but clouds of smoke would come out. Even when it did work, smoke would still pour out along with it.

Ashmore had been lucky. Every other Night Fury had been given a number instead of a name. Shade had been 2-9. The ninth Night Fury born into the second generation. Ashmore hadn't been given a number-although Shade had reason to believe he would've been 2-8. Instead, the scientists decided to incorporate him into another experiment. They gave him a name as part of an experiment. From what Shade understood, they were trying to determine whether having a proper name made any difference in his behavior, or something along those lines.

It wasn't entirely good, however. With the privilege of a name came the embarrassment of having to wear a collar with a name tag attached at all times. Others would occasionally make fun of him for it. Shade hadn't, though. Ashmore had been his only friend, and he didn't want to push his only friend away. More than that, Ashmore had been the only person he cared about, and vice versa. Neither of them had even known their parents.

He suspected that the first generation had been genetically engineered. Multiple times, Matt had mentioned that the labs had been genetically engineering various creatures. When he found out that dragons supposedly didn't exist, he put two and two together. Also, while he was in the lab, he had sometimes heard scientists talking. But one thing had always been confusing to him: why would they have two generations if all of them had been genetically engineered? He believed that his generation was born naturally.

Shade and Ashmore would spend their time talking. They talked about whatever they had on their minds. Most of all, they talking about what they thought it might be outside the laboratory, or about escaping, or about flying.

Other Night Furies told them it was foolish to talk about such things. They had lost all hope that they would ever leave. But Shade and Ashmore kept their hope alive. They heard whisperings from other Night Furies around them that the scientists had been heard talking about a "center of operations" somewhere in a place called "New Hampshire." They had always planned on going there if they ever escaped, and ending all the pain the scientists were causing.

Years passed. Things only got worse. When Z-Day finally came around, while the humans in the city outside had been running for their lives, Shade and Ashmore had been running for their freedom. While the humans were scared and distraught, they had been excited and overjoyed.

Some Night Furies never made it out. Some were killed on the streets, by police officers or paranoid humans. Some had made it through. Shade didn't know if Ashmore had been one of them. They had been separated. Once he escaped the city, Shade spent weeks looking for his friend. He never found him. Eventually, he gave up. To the day, he still remembered Ashmore, and would sometimes wonder if his old

friend was still alive, and if so, he wondered if he would recognize him now.

He became a wanderer, simply avoiding zombies and enjoying his freedom. Some called the world after Z-Day Hell, but to Shade it was more like Purgatory.

Now, of course, there were no scientists anymore, and the only reason Shade went to New Hampshire was because Matt was going there, and he still clung to the faint hope that Ashmore might have survived and gone there as well.

Only now he was right back where he started, except in New Hampshire this time.

Shade was jolted out of his memories as his cell shuddered to a halt. He waited a few moments, and then it started moving again, only down this time. This trip was much shorter, and as soon as it stopped, the walls of the cell began to lift. The floor, however, remained behind.

"Welcome to the Aperture Science Enrichment Center," _said GLaDOS.

"Oh. There you are again. I was hoping you'd left for good," Shade replied.

Being unable to understand him, GLaDOS didn't answer. Instead, she said, "Seeing as you are much bigger than most of our test subjects-" _Shade's ears flattened at the phrase 'test subject'- _"We will be providing you with more customized tests. First, however, you must learn the ropes. You have been brought to an old introductory course designed for multiple subjects. The doorways in here are bigger than those in the normal courses.. You should have no trouble getting through."_

As she was talking, the walls continued lifting. Shade could see what lay beyond now.

"Well," he said. "Guess I have no choice, then. Let's get started."

"You are now in possession of the Aperture Science handheld portal device," _GLaDOS informed. _"With it, you can create your own portals. These inter-dimensional gates are proven to be completely safe. The device, however, has not. Do not touch the operational end of the device. Do not look directly at the operational end of the device. Do not submerge the device in liquid, even partially."_

Trent had been testing for about twenty minutes now. So far, the tests were rather simple, and easy to solve. GLaDOS had told him that they were tutorial tests, designed to help test subjects learn the ropes.

He had just completed a test that had taken him into the center of a chamber with a large, rotating pedestal in the middle. On the pedestal was a gun that was shooting blue portals onto the walls. He had taken the gun and used it to get to the chamber's exit.

"Good to know," Trent commented. "Damn, this thing is cool."

He walked through the door. Through it was another hallway, another emancipation grid, and another elevator. He walked through the grid, feeling the now familiar electric feeling pass over him.

As he stepped into the elevator, the doors slid shut behind him. The elevator ascended this time. When it reached its destination, the door opened, and Trent stepped out. He walked down the hallway into yet another testing chamber.

It was another hallway, except much bigger than the one he had just come out of. It was two stories tall, easily. At the end, a doorway led into what he presumed to be another hallway. In between him and the exit, however, was a huge gap.

On the wall on the opposite side of the gap was an orange portal.

"That's it?" Trent asked. "This is easy!"

He shot a blue portal at the wall next to him and stepped through it, emerging on the other side.

Looking through the doorway, he saw that it indeed led into yet another hallway. Again, there was an emancipation grid. But instead of an elevator, another test chamber lay beyond.

As he proceeded down the hallway, a question came to mind.

"How big is this place, anyway?" he asked.

_"Aperture Laboratories is 50 stories deep and 50 acres in area," GLaDOS replied. _"Does that answer your question?"_

"Jesus Christ."

"I take that as a yes."

The elevator slowed to a stop. But the doors didn't open.

Shade murmured in confusion. _What's going on? _He wondered. _Why did it stop?_

_"I'm sorry," _said GLaDOS, as if reading his mind. _"The following test chamber requires a little bit of customization before you can enter it. This shouldn't take long."_

Shade sat down on his hind legs, thinking. What did she mean by "customization?" What was awaiting him in the next chamber?

He didn't trust GLaDOS. Not in the slightest. And for good reason; she had gassed him, and was holding him captive! And she was basically indirectly kill his friend. Therefore, he was worried about what she might be doing with the next test chamber.

After a few minutes had passed, she spoke. _"Okay. The test chamber is ready. You may proceed."_

The elevator door opened. Shade trotted out, and observed the new

test chamber.

It was massive.

In front of him was a glass wall. Beyond that, about one story below him, were many different chambers. In the middle of each one was a strange looking gun attached to a rotating pedestal. They rotated in sync, and every ninety degrees they stopped, and fired a ball of a strange blue substance.

On the bottom half of every chamber was a white wall, surrounding it on all four sides. When the blue substance hit the wall, it formed a blue portal.

As he stared at the guns in awe, he noticed something strange about the first one. It was different than the others. The body of the gun was the same, but there were odd-looking wires branching off of it.

_"This test chamber was originally designed for multiple users," _GLaDOS explained. _"Each one of these devices was made for one user. Your objective is to get to the first one- which has been designed for your use- and then out through the door."_

Looking across the chamber, Shade saw, all the way on the other side, a door. Surrounding the door were several orange portals.

Just then, he also noticed something else. The portals had fired again- to his right, this time- but no portal had appeared. He looked closely, and saw that there were holes in the wall. He turned his head to the right, and saw a hallway sloping from his room down to the lower floor of the chamber, before turning to the left. He proceeded to walk down it, and when he reached the bottom, he turned, and found himself looking down another hallway that stretched the length of the chamber. The holes that he had seen in the guns' rooms led here. The hallway itself was a dead end. Butâ€|

A plan formed in his head. He walked down the hallway until he reached the first hole. Looking through it, he saw his objective; the portal gun. It had just shot a portal at the wall opposite him, and was turning counter-clockwise.

Shade stepped out of the way and waited. He heard the portal gun turn, and shoot a portal at the wall next to his. One more rotation, and it would be here.

The gun turned again and shot. All at once, multiple balls of blue portal substance flew through all of the holes in the hallway, and multiple blue portals appeared all along the walls.

Shade noticed that his portal was bigger than the others. _That must be part of the 'customization' she was doing,_ he thought. He walked through the portal quickly, before the gun had a chance to shoot another. Just as his tail fin exited after him, the gun shot again, and the portal disappeared.

He approached the pedestal. When he was about a foot in front of it, it stopped rotating. Several small holes opened up in the floor, and several mechanical arms came out of them. Four of them grabbed onto his legs, and two more to his wings. Startled, he growled and

thrashed, trying to free himself.

"Please do not struggle," GLaDOS ordered. "This will be over quickly."

Shade forced himself to calm down. Two more mechanical arms picked up the portal gun, and the last two were carrying some strange wire. Those two approached him.

"This may sting a bit."

A shiver went down Shade's spine. He had been told that exact same thing a long time ago.

He forced the memory away.

The mechanical arms positioned themselves above Shade's right shoulder. He fought anxiety away as he felt them probing his scales with the wires. The arms stuck them under his scales, and poked at the flesh beneath. Suddenly, pain flared from his shoulder. It wasn't unbearable, but it still hurt.

He felt the arms pushing the wires into his body. They dug carefully through his flesh. As they went deeper, the pain grew steadily worse. Suddenly, it became unbearable, as he felt the wires penetrate his spinal cord.

He roared in a combination of pain and shock. He tried to escape, but the arms were too strong, and it did nothing but make the pain worse. The arms withdrew the wires from his body, but then started poking them in a new place. The pain from his spine, however, was so intense that he almost didn't notice. Almost.

The pain grew even worse, as the wires penetrated his spinal cord a second time. He roared again, and tried to bite the arms, but couldn't reach. They quickly withdrew the wires, and retreated to their holes.

The arms holding the portal gun moved forward. It was then that Shade realized what they were doing. There were four wires coming off of the portal gun, with strange-looking ends that branched off into smaller and smaller wires. He felt the arms positioning the gun on his shoulder, and then felt them shoving the wires the newly made holes in his body.

Suddenly, he felt something click into his spinal cord, and the pain from two of the holes completely disappeared. He felt the arms push the gun's other two wires into the other two holes, and then felt another click. The pain disappeared completely, except for a dull ache.

A completely new feeling swept over him. He could feel the portal gun, not just physically, but mentally as well. It was as if it were a part of him. The mechanical arms released him, and retreated into their holes. He shook his shoulders lightly to get adjusted to the new appendage, then, just by the force of his will, he made the gun shoot a portal onto the wall.

"This is amazing," he thought.

_ "You are now in possession of the Aperture Science portal device," _GLaDOS informed him. _ "With it, you can create your own portals. These inter-dimensional gates have proven to be completely safe. The device, however, has not. Do not touch the operational end of the device. Do not look directly at the operational end of the device. Do not submerge the device in liquid, even partially._

_ "Your device has been attached to your spinal cord using special Aperture technologies, and is tapping into your nervous system. Therefore, you can control it with your brain. The attachment is not permanent, and all that is required to undo it is removal of the device. Be warned, however, that the device is attached very well, and will require some strength to remove it. Also, removal of the device will result in intense pain."_

"Great. Pain. Love it," Shade said sarcastically. _Oh well. I'll deal with that later, _he thought.

He glanced at his portal and realized he could see part of the door through it. Furthermore, the door was open. He walked through it and exited the chamber.

The elevator doors opened, and Matt stepped out, brandishing his portal gun.

More time had passed. Since he had gotten the blue gun, more obstacles had been introduced. He was surprised by how much in _Portal _was true. Everything so far had been something from the game; from the weighted cubes to the balls of energy that unlocked doors but also killed you on contact. There was one thing he was gravely worried about, however.

_ "Please note that we have added a consequence for failure," _GLaDOS informed. _ "Any contact with the chamber floor will result in an unsatisfactory mark on your testing record, followed by death. Good luck!"_

And there it was.

The death penalty.

His heartbeat quickened with anxiety as he entered the test chamber. As he emerged onto a balcony, he observed the chamber he was in. Squinting, he tried to see what was on the other side of the chamber. He was farsighted, and while he could function fine without glasses, he still couldn't see clearly from far away. Before Z-Day, he had had glasses, but they had broken. His spare was at his house in Lyndrich.

_If I ever get out of here, and manage to get back home, the first thing I'm going to do is get those glasses, _Matt thought.

He was just barely able to make out the entire test chamber, however. On a balcony on the opposite side of the room was the door. It was open this time, but there was no visible way to get to it. The walls surrounding it were brown, which meant that they were made of a substance that could not make portals. There were two platforms in between. One was attached to the wall, with an orange portal on it, and the other one had the ability to move. However, it had no power, and thus it remained still. An energy ball bounced across one side of

the room. Right next to the moving platform was a receptacle for it.

From experience playing `_Portal_`, Matt knew what was going on. The object was to use portals to get the energy ball into the receptacle, thus activating the moving platform. Then, use portals to get to the platform, which will take you to the door.

He shot a blue portal at the wall next to him and stepped through it. When he emerged on the stationary platform, he followed the path of the energy ball with his eyes, looking for the tell-tale black smudge that would mark the exact spot where it was colliding with the wall. When he found it, he shot the blue portal, and ducked. The last thing he wanted was to be hit by the ball; it would most likely either vaporize him, or knock him to the floor. Either way, he would die.

The ball went over his head and bounced against the wall on the other side of the room. It flew back over his head again, and then back through the portal. When it was gone, he looked for the receptacle. Upon finding it, he traced a path with his eyes to the wall on the opposite side of the room. After the ball passed over his head a third time, he shot a portal. The ball bounced off the opposite wall and flew over his head one final time and through the portal. It flew across the room and into the receptacle.

The receptacle closed over it, and an electric humming noise was produced. The moving platform sprang to life, and began its path towards the exit.

About halfway to the door, it crossed into an area that was covered in brown walls rather than white. Matt shot a blue portal on the white wall, faced the orange portal behind him, and waited for it to come back.

The platform moved maddeningly slow. When it finally returned, he hopped through the portal and onto the platform.

He let out a sigh of relief. He had made it! The platform reached the balcony, and he hopped off and scrambled through the door, away from the test chamber and its deadly green gas. As he stepped into the elevator beyond, the doors slid shut behind him.

`_"Very impressive," _GLaDOS commented. _"Please note that any appearance of danger is merely a device to enhance your testing experience._"`

`_Sure it is, _thought Matt. But he said nothing.`

The elevator stopped, and the doors opened. When he entered the new chamber, two things came to his attention. The first was that this was unlike any test he'd been in so far. He was in what looked like an observation deck, and a giant glass window gave him a view of the rest of the chamber. From beyond the window, he could hear a portal gun.

He ran over to the window and looked out. In the center of a sea of green gas was a platform, and on that platform was another portal gun on another rotating pedestal. Instead of shooting blue portals, however, it was shooting orange ones.

Alright, said Matt. _Time for the next level._

_"Throughout the tests you have completed, you have shown incredible intelligence and strength," _said GLaDOS. _"Your flying skills are just as good as the file says they should be. I am very impressed._

Since he had received the upgrade to his portal gun, Shade had been completing much different sorts of tests. GLaDOS had been bringing him to test chambers meant to test his Night Fury qualities, rather than his ability to work with portals. She had informed him that they would come back to the portals later on.

She had given him tests where he had to push his strength to the limit, or maneuver around countless obstacles in flight. She had even tested his fire power. He didn't know what was next, and he was starting not to care. All he wanted was to leave.

Right now, he was in an elevator, riding to the next test. The cabin shuddered to a halt, the doors opened, and he stepped out, only to freeze in place, gawking at the sight in front of him.

The test chamber was a long hallway, and the deadly green gas covered its floor as far as he could see. The rest was completely filled with fire.

The fire shot out of holes, from the ceilings, the walls, and even the floor. Beyond his platform there wasn't a cubic inch of space not filled by gas or fire.

_"Your file says your kind has a natural immunity to fire," _GLaDOS explained. _"If you are worried about your device, don't be. All Aperture technologies remain safely operational up to four thousand degrees Kelvin. Rest assured that there is no chance of a dangerous equipment malfunction. Now, let's see how fireproof you _really _are._

He tried to get himself to move, but his legs weren't responding. His mind was drifting off. Two years ago, someone else had said that _exact _same sentence to him. The memory was coming back, and he tried his best to keep it away. But it wasn't working. The memory was coming back; the one he had spent so long trying to forgetâ€¦|

****October 2nd, 2013****

Towards the end of Shade's time in the lab, things became much worse. It wasn't even gradual; it happened suddenly. One day, the tests were normal, the next, Night Furies who were taken for testing didn't come back for weeks. When they did come back, they were scarred. Some had gaping wounds- for instance; one test had been on whether or not a Night Fury could fly without his or her tail fin. All of them had been through intense agony, and not all of them returned immediately. Some never returned at all.

Those who did return were often changed. Some managed to be strong and recover, but others were turned into nervous wrecks, and would shy away at the very mention of a human afterwards. Shade and Ashmore lived in constant fear that they would be next. And one day, their

fears came true.

The sound of the doors opening crashed through the room. Instantly, every dragon was silent, and they all shied away from their cage doors.

"Ugly fuckers must know what's coming," said a scientist.

The group of scientists- five of them- walked down the hall. Shade could hear the jingling of keys, and prayed that they would pass them.

They stopped in front of his cage. "Him."

"No!" Please, no!" he thought.

"No!" Ashmore echoed his thoughts. A scientist produced a key from a large key ring and unlocked Shade's cage.

"Please! Don't take him!" Ashmore begged. "Take me instead!"

The scientists, of course, couldn't understand him. They ignored his please, and opened Shade's cage.

"You're coming with us," one of them said.

Shade had no choice but to follow. If he tried to resist, he would fail, and it would be ten times worse for him. He approached the door, head down and tail drooping.

A scientist covered his head with a cloth sack and held it there. As they led him out of his cage, Ashmore yelled, "No! Please!"

"I'll be okay!" Shade promised. "Don't worry about me!"

He wondered which of them he was trying to convince.

The scientists led him through a series of hallways. He had no idea where he was, only where he was going. The testing room. He had been in there many times, usually for small, annoying tests. He knew it would be different this time. His mind started producing horrific images of what might be in store for him. Every step he took felt like another step towards certain death.

They finally reached the testing room. "Here he is, sir," said one of the scientists.

"Good," said a voice, one Shade didn't recognize. "Strap him in, please."

The sack was removed from his head. The scientists who had escorted him were in the room with them, as well as another, one he didn't recognize. He was older than all of the others, and clearly in charge.

He directed Shade to a table in the middle of the testing area, with curved metal bars attached on a hinge. It was about his size. He realized the scientist wanted him to lay on it, and hopped onto the table, lying as the scientist directed.

The scientist nodded to the others, who proceeded to lower the bars over Shade's scaly body. They pinned him down to the table so tightly that he couldn't move even slightly. They even pinned down his tail. Each and every second that passed seemed to drag on forever. His heart beat faster than it ever had before, and his fear was nearing its peak.

As they were doing this, the one in charge held a small microphone in his hand.

"This is Dr. Corvus. It is 12:44 PM on December 2nd, 2013. We are testing Night Fury subject two dash nine today," he began. As he was speaking, another scientist was putting some sort of mask over Shade's head. It covered everything, leaving only two eyeholes and a large opening over his mouth. The scientist buckled the mask tightly, and stuck his hands through the mouth hole to force Shade's mouth open and wrap two steel cords around his jaws to hold them in place.

"The subject is a smaller male dragon," Corvus continued. He recorded Shade's weight, length, height, and other details like that. Another scientist began attaching strange electrodes to his mask.

"His kind has shown a naturally immunity to fire. Externally, that is," Corvus explained. "We do not know what the effects of fire are on their insides."

Shade's eyes widened in pure terror. He had accidentally ingested another dragon's fire before; while his own fire didn't bother him, another dragon's hurt. A lot.

"Some may call this inhumane. I, for one, call it science. We need to know everything about these creatures," said Corvus. "For the sake of science, and for the sake of our people. We need to know the full extent of what mankind can accomplish. "The subject will not receive anesthesia. We need him to be fully awake and alert. If pain is part of the results, then pain is what we need to see." He grabbed a strange looking hose from under the table and started screwing it into the mouth hole on Shade's mask.

He began panicking. Desperately, he tried to close his mouth, but the steel cords were preventing him from doing so. No matter how hard he tried, they wouldn't budge. All he managed to do was cut the roof of his mouth. He tried to thrash and struggle in an attempt to break free of the metal bars that held him in place, but they were too tight.

"You're not getting out," Corvus said to him. "This device is designed specifically to hold a Night Fury. It's even fireproof."

"This is wrong," one of the scientists blurted out.

Corvus's facial expression changed to a grave, deadly look. He turned around. "What did you say?" he asked.

"This is wrong," the scientist, a female, replied. "All these so called 'tests'â€¦ They're inhumane!"

Corvus walked up to her and looked her in the eye. "And what do you

think you can do to stop me?" he asked.

"Help me!" Shade begged, his voice muffled through the mask. All thoughts of her not being able to understand him escaped his mind. He was so scared at this point that all common sense had left him. "Please!"

She said nothing.

"I thought so," said Corvus.

"If word about this ever gets out, you're going to jail," she said.

"But word is not going to get out!" he exclaimed. "You've all been sworn to secrecy, and if any of you go blabbing, the punishment is on you. We've got the backing of the government. We are invincible; above the law. If you try to rat us out, you'll be the one in trouble." He paused for a moment, looking around the room at all of the scientists. "Are we clear?"

No response. "I said, are we clear?!" he barked.

"Yes sir," the scientists said in unison.

"Now, those who have a weak stomach may step out of the room," he offered. "Now."

*****Any readers who are really squeamish or may have triggers should probably heed his words*****

The scientist who had spoken up moved slightly, hesitated, and then left.

"Would anyone else like to chicken out?"

Nobody moved.

"Good." He turned to Shade, who was still desperately trying to free himself. "Now," he said. "Let's see how fireproof you really are."

He walked over to a lever on the wall. Before pulling it, he entered two numbers on an electronic pad next to it. Then, he gripped it with his hand and turned to Shade.

"No!" Shade begged. "Please! Don't do this!"

"This may sting a bit," said Corvus.

"No!"

He threw the lever.

Shade thrashed even more, panic fully overtaking him. Beneath him there was a faint rumbling noise. He could feel it traveling up the hose. It grew hotter, hotter, hotter!

And then the fire came.

It shot into his mouth and down his throat, scorching his flesh in its wake. Never before in his life had he ever experience so much pain. It was unbearable. He could feel his insides burning in full agonizing detail.

He roared in agony and lost control of his mind. His thrashings increased as he tried every way possible to free himself. Nothing worked. He only managed to hurt himself even more. Seconds passed, and they felt like hours. Nothing was real to him except the pain.

"His pain readings are off the charts," one of the scientists said. "Jesus Christ, we're killing him!"

Corvus ignored him.

They watched as Shade continued thrashing and roaring. He felt the pain eating away at the very essence of his being. He was descending into insanity, and could feel death approaching.

Finally, just as he felt like he was about to slip away, the fire stopped.

He laid still. The fire had gone, but he felt as if his insides were still burning. He couldn't see, but he knew his mouth and throat must be a wreck.

"You. Get me some anesthesia," Corvus ordered to one of the scientists.

The scientist obeyed. He went into a drawer, produced a syringe, and handed it to Corvus.

"Thank you," he said. He walked over to Shade, who was lying still, barely breathing, and not caring anymore. The scientist injected him with the anesthesia, and the dragon slipped out of consciousness.

"Not so fireproof on the inside, are you?" Corvus asked. He removed a pair of latex gloves from his hands and threw them away. "Get him to the infirmary," he commanded. "I want a full report of his condition, and see if they can't save his life. We might need him again."

* * *

><p>Alright, next chapter on Sunday! I don't really have much time to say anything else, so let me know what you think!

13. Chapter Twelve: The Cake

So, this is a weird landmark for me. This is as far as I've revised into the story. After this, I'll have to work a lot harder to get these chapters published on time. On the other hand, I have a lot more time during the week now, so it evens out pretty well.

Anyway, this is part two of what I like to call the Portal Trilogy. I hope you like it!

****Disclaimer: I don't own Portal or HTTYD.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Twelve:

****The Cake****

****Aperture Laboratories****

****November 3****rd****, 2013****

A month passed.

Shade was taken to the infirmary. His insides had suffered massive damage. Pictures taken by the doctors revealed parts of them to be scorched pitch black. Although the doctors fought desperately to save his life, they were almost certain that he would die. He was hooked up to lots of different tubes that supplied him with nutrients and medicine, and was in a comatose state. He couldn't even breathe on his own. But, despite all of that, something amazing happened.

He lived.

He woke up one morning, about two weeks after the incident. The doctors had removed some of the tubes, as he had regained the ability to breathe on his own. Some time after he woke up, they began letting him eat and drink on his own as well. Of course, there was still pain, but it was nothing compared to what it had been during the test.

For most of those first few days, he did little except sleep and eat. It hurt to move, and he was tired. The only thing he really did was eavesdrop. He learned that the doctors absolutely despised Martinez, and denounced him as an incarnation of the devil himself. At the time, Shade didn't know who 'the devil' was. Unlike the scientists, the doctors somewhat cared for the well-being of the Night Furies.

One time, he overheard a particularly interesting story. When they had first seen him, the head doctor had practically exploded in a fit of rage. He confronted Martinez, and the two had an intense argument, resulting in the doctor's demotion.

About a week after he had awoken from his comatose state, Shade began to feel restless. He was worried about Ashmore; he had no idea how long he'd been away, and he was worried that his friend might think he was dead.

After almost a month in the infirmary, he had made an almost full recovery. Of course, his insides would always be especially sensitive to fire, but only his insides. His external immunity to fire remained as effective as ever.

His recovery shocked the doctors. They theorized that since he was immune to fire on the outside, then even on the inside a burn-related wound could heal fast. None of them dared to tell that to Martinez, however, for fear of how he would test it.

Finally, after a month of being cooped up in the infirmary, they released him.

A group of scientists came to get him. They filled out some paperwork, and then proceeded into the infirmary.

When he saw them walking towards him, Shade tried to retreat, letting out a warning growl. Seeing this, one said, "Relax. We're only taking you back to your cage."

He allowed himself to submit. Like before, the scientists put a sack over his head and led him out of the room. As they led him through the hallways, worry coursed through him. He had no way of knowing if Ashmore was still there. For all he knew, his friend could've been taken and killed by Martinez.

They reached the entrance to the lab, and Shade could hear the clinking of keys as one of the scientists fumbled with his key ring. He heard the door unlock and open.

In the room beyond, the Night Furies in their cages fell silent. _They must think the scientists are here for them, _Shade thought.

The scientist that had unlocked the door walked forward several paces, and then stopped. Shade heard the clinking of keys again, and guessed that he was unlocking his cage.

He sniffed the air. The sack around his head was muffling his sense of smell, but he could just barely make out Ashmore's scent. A huge feeling of relief passed through him. Ashmore was alive, and he was more grateful for his friend's life than even his own.

Shade heard his cage door open, and the scientist said, "Bring him in."

The other scientists led Shade to his cage. They pulled the bag off of his head, shoved him in, and locked the door behind him.

"Youâ€¦ You're alive!" Ashmore exclaimed from the cage next to him as the scientists exited the room. "I thought you were dead!"

Shade sighed. "I thought I was, for a bit." He looked his friend in the eye. "I was scared you might be too."

"Why would you think that?" Ashmore asked, confused. His pupils narrowed. "Where have they been keeping you?"

"The infirmary. I don't know how long I've been there. I know it's been at least two weeks."

"A month," said Ashmore. "What the hell did they do to you?"

A tremor ran through his body, as Shade tried to find the words to explain what he had been through. He told his friend about the walk to the testing room, Dr. Martinez, and the table he had been pinned to. As he was about to tell him about the fire, his voice broke off.

"What?" Ashmore asked. "What did they do to you?"

Shade tried to talk, but the words wouldn't come.

"You can tell me," said Ashmore.

"Theyâ€¦ They pumped fire into me. Through my mouth."

Ashmore was speechless. He had been expecting something bad, but thisâ€¦ This was far worse than anything he had thought of.

"Thisâ€¦ That's horrible," said Ashmore. "I can't believe you're still alive!"

"I can't believe it either," said Shade. "I'm just glad you are too. I was so scared that he might've come in and taken you, andâ€¦" his voice broke off.

Ashmore didn't respond. "You have no idea how hard it was," he said. "When they didn't bring you back, Iâ€¦ I didn't know what to think. After another week, I had given up hope." He looked Shade in the eye. "You can't even imagine the feeling of losing the only friend you've ever hadâ€¦" He shuddered, a haunted expression present on his face. A tear appeared in his eye.

Shade stuck a paw through a hole in their cages, and rested it comfortingly on Ashmore's shoulder. He had never seen the larger dragon like this before. Usually, Ashmore was lively and optimistic. Seeing him in this state worried him.

"But I'm back now," Shade said. "And you're still here. We were in this together before, and we still are."

"How can you say that, after what they did to you?" Ashmore shook his head. "This placeâ€¦ It's going to kill us."

"Hey," Shade said sternly. "Look at me."

Ashmore lifted his head, and looked his friend in the eye.

"Listen to me," Shade said. "That is not going to happen. You hear me? Never!"

"Why not?" asked Ashmore. "What's stopping them from killing us right now? Me? You?" He looked at the floor. "No. Nothing is."

They sat in silence for a moment. Then, Shade opened his mouth and spoke. "Maybe something is."

Ashmore looked at him in surprise. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"That 'test' should've killed me," said Shade. "The painâ€¦ I've never felt anything like that. It hurts just remembering it. That was the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I caught a glimpse of some of the pictures they took from inside me. Everything was dead. They even said I shouldn't be alive. So, then, why am I?"

Ashmore shook his head. "So you got lucky," he said.

"Maybe," Shade replied. "Maybe it's luck that's on our side. But

maybe, just maybe, it's something- or some_one- _else."

Ashmore looked down. After a few moments, he took a breath, and opened his mouth. "I'm scared," he said.

He pressed himself against the side of his cage, and wrapped his paw comfortingly around Ashmore's neck. "I am too," he said. "But we'll get out of here one day. I promise."

"I hope so."

Shade could tell what was happening. Ashmore was beginning to lose hope. Desperation filled him, but he fought the feelings away. He had survived what he shouldn't have been able to. That gave him more hope than ever. And if Ashmore was starting to lose his, well, Shade would have to hope for the both of them.

"I'm glad you're alive," said Ashmore. "More than you know. I'd go insane here without you."

"And I you," Shade replied.

Ashmore looked at him. "So, what was the infirmary like?"

Shade chuckled. "Well, it was a lot more comfortable than this dump," he replied.

"Well, that went without saying," said Ashmore. "What did they do, anyway? To save you, I mean."

Shade told him what had happened. And the two talked. They talked about everything, from escaping, to flying, to dragonesses. As they talked, the mood became much lighter, and after a while, they were joking with each other. Then, after they had been talking for a while, they got tired, and they went to sleep.

"Goodnight, Ashmore," said Shade.

"Goodnight."

****Present Day****

Shade trembled as the memories flew through his head, and latched onto that last, happy moment, trying to think of nothing else. It didn't work.

_Martinezâ€| _he thought, and cursed the scientist's name. He hated Martinez, not only for what he had done to him, but for what he had done to all the other Night Furies as well. Especially Ashmoreâ€|

_No! _he scolded himself. He couldn't think about Martinez now. It would only make this more difficult than it needed to be. _Besides; he's probably dead now anyway._

He remembered the good times he had had with Ashmore. He put aside all thoughts of the scientists, or testing, or the fact that Ashmore was probably dead. Taking these happy memories, he used them as a shield against the bad ones. Doing so gave him the strength to push on.

_"__Are you going, or aren't you?" _asked GLaDOS.

"Go to Hell," Shade replied, his voice dripping with venom. He braced himself, unfurled his wings, and took off into the fire.

It was hot, but there was no pain. Shade closed his eyes and flew forward, hoping the chamber stayed straight. He was lucky.

As soon as he felt his surroundings cool down, he opened his eyes and saw an exit. His scales were still hot, but they were cooling down. He spat out a stray spark that had gotten into his mouth, and dove towards the door.

His wingtips grazed the doorway as he swept through it, folding them in at the same time. He landed gracefully in the hallway beyond, and ran into the elevator.

In the excitement, he found himself going too fast. He sped into the elevator, and was unable to stop before all of his weight crashed into the elevator wall at full speed.

Dazed, he regained his footing and shook his head clear. _That sucked, _he thought.

_"__Very good. My curiosity is satisfied for now. You will return to portal testing," _said GLaDOS.

Shade was still dazed from his collision with the wall, and he was unable to think of a response. He did notice one thing, however. Right where he had collided with the wall was a large crack that ran halfway from floor to ceiling. Many smaller cracks branched off of it.

An idea formed in Shade's head. He had no idea if he would be able to pull it off- or if he would survive if he did- but it was worth a try.

The elevator doors closed behind him, and the elevator began its descent. Shade backed up all the way to the door and crouched, ready to pounce.

_"__What are you doing?" _asked GLaDOS.

Shade ignored her. He bunched himself into the wall as much as he could before he leapt.

He smashed into the crack, throwing every ounce of his body weight into it. There was a loud crack, as the damage done to the wall was worsened.

_"__Stop it!" _GLaDOS demanded.

Shade walked back to the door, and got ready to pounce again.

_"__If you do this, your friends will die. I'll kill them."_

"No, you won't. You said it yourself; you have your needs. And I have mine. I _need _to get out!"

At the word 'out' he launched himself at the wall again. The crack widened, and he was starting to be able to see through it now.

_"__Fine then. You leave me no choice."_

The elevator stopped. A feeling of anxiety passed through him, but he ignored it, and launched himself at the wall again. The crack was now a small gap, and he could clearly see through it to the metal wall behind.

As he prepared to leap again, he heard a disturbing snapping noise. Almost immediately, the elevator lurched, and started falling.

Shade roared in surprise as he lost his balance, but regained his footing, and launched himself at the wall again. This time, however, he aimed more towards the ceiling.

As he crashed into it, the crack spread to the ceiling. Shade gathered himself back on the floor, and prepared for another jump.

_I'm out of time, _he realized. _It's now or never. I can survive an explosion, but not an impact at this speed._

He shot a fire ball at the ceiling, weakening it and spreading the crack. To be safe, he shot two more. He felt his heart jump in excitement as a piece of it broke away.

"Come on!" he yelled, before jumping as hard as he could. He put everything he had into it. He collided painfully with the ceiling, and felt a flicker of pure joy as he felt it break away.

Quickly, he squeezed himself through the hole and unfurled his wings. It was a tight space, and he couldn't unfurl them to their maximum length, but it was enough. He pushed them down, and felt himself move up.

Below him, the elevator impacted with the ground, and the entire shaft rocked with the explosion. The hot air rushed up to meet him, and he accelerated upwards at an alarming rate.

When the flames had cleared away, Shade glanced down at the smoldering wreckage of what had once been the elevator. The explosion had caused a whole section of the wall to crumble away, revealing a dank brick hallway that was a stark contrast with the pristine laboratories he had seen so far.

He stretched his wings as much as he could and parachuted down amongst the wreckage. Upon landing, he checked to make sure his portal gun was still attached. It was.

He looked down the hallway and saw several strange mechanisms, as well as two other hallways branching off. They had signs marking them. The one to the right read "Incinerator" and the one to the left read, "Stairs."

Shade took the left.

_"__Well done," _GLaDOS congratulated. _"You have completed the

ultimate test. You see, I brought you here to see how long it would take for you to devise a plan of escape. That was the real test. The portals were just distractions. You are now free to return to wherever you came from. If you would just wait there, an escort will arrive to take you to the exit."_

"You know what, GLaDOS?" Shade asked. "If there's one thing I've learned in life, it's that you can never trust a scientist."

"What the fuck is this?"

Trent stared at the ground, where a cube had fallen from a tube in front of him. The cube was just like any of the other cubes he had seen, except for a pink heart that had been painted on the center of each side.

_"__This weighted companion cube will accompany you through the test chamber," _GLaDOS replied. _"Please take care of it."_

"Again," said Trent. "What the fuck is this?"

There was no response.

Trent sighed and picked up the cube. "Whatever," he said.

As he began to make his way down the hallway, a huge tremor rocked the chamber, and he heard an explosion close by. The lights dimmed, and for a brief moment they flickered out, before coming back on again. Losing his balance, Trent fell to the ground.

The companion cube followed suit, and landed on his chest. Groaning in pain, he shoved the cube off. "I'm trying to take care of you, and you try to kill me?" he asked. "What the hell, man?" He stood up and gasped, catching his breath. "What _was_ that?"

_"__Never mind that," _GLaDOS replied. _"Nothing is wrong. Anyway, I must ask you to return to the elevator. We will do this test later. Leave the companion cube where it is."_

"Sure," Trent acknowledged. He was about to do as she said, when something caught his eye.

Usually, the tubes that transported cubes to the chamber had metal coverings on them that slid open and closed. These metal coverings only opened when a cube was being dropped; otherwise, they were always closed. But the explosion- whatever it had been- seemed to have jarred this one open.

An idea began forming in his head.

Noâ€¦ I can't. She'll kill Matt and Shade.

But something told him that wasn't true. GLaDOS was holding them captive solely for the purpose of testing, it seemed. If that truly was her only motive, then she needed them alive. He didn't think she would kill his friends just because he got out. No. She would kill him. Aperture Laboratories was a massive building, and it would take him forever to find the others. More than enough time for the AI to take his life.

Still, he had to try.

He repositioned the companion cube so that it was under the tube, and pulled himself on top of it. Reaching his arms upward, he was able to reach the tube.

_"__What are you doing?" _GLaDOS asked.

Trent was just barely able to fit through the opening. He placed his portal gun in the tube, and hoisted himself up. The opening gave jerking movements, as GLaDOS frantically tried to shake him loose, but it was jammed.

He pulled himself all the way into the tube and collected his portal gun.

_"__Stop it!" _GLaDOS commanded.

"Not today!" Trent exclaimed. He pressed his feet against the sides of the tube, and pushed himself up. Above him, the tube connected at a right angle to a larger transportation tube, which seemed to be built to carry the cubes throughout the laboratories. He pushed himself up until he reached the transportation tube.

He was hit by a gust of air, which was carrying a few cubes along with it. The cubes missed him, but the air dragged him into the tube and away from the chamber.

"Shit!" he exclaimed. He grabbed at the walls, searching for a handhold, but there were none. Around him, cubes that were going much faster than he was shot by, narrowly missing him.

Suddenly, one collided with him, and intense pain shot through his body. He yelled in surprise and agony, and was spun around.

I have to get out of here, he thought. _This is going to kill me._

The tube curved, and began a downward spiral. Suddenly, Trent felt strange vibrations coming from the tube walls. Almost as if something was pounding against themâ€|

There was a crashing noise from below him, and the airflow in the tube was disrupted. _Did something puncture the tube? _Trent wondered.

He was about to find out.

The tube continued its downward spiral. In a matter of seconds, Trent saw the source of the disturbance. Right in front of him was a giant, jagged hole in the wall of the tube.

Without hesitation, he steered himself right for the hole. As he shot out of it, he felt a ripping sensation in his right leg, and a jagged, burning pain came from it.

The momentum from the tube sent him flying into a wall. He crashed to the floor, face down, and waited to get his breath back. His body ached all over- especially his leg. When he regained his breath, he rolled over, and looked around.

He found himself in a large, tall room. Unlike the shiny, pristine laboratory he had just come from, this room was dank and dirty. In the center of the room, the tube coiled around from ceiling to floor. There was a large, jagged hole where he had come out of. Looking closer, he saw that one of the sharp, glass edges of the hole was dripping with some sort of dark liquid.

Pain flared from his leg again. He looked at it, and saw that the glass had torn through his pant leg and cut deep into the flesh beneath. The gash was about half a foot long and bleeding.

"Fuck," he cursed through gritted teeth.

He was startled by a warble, and two emerald green eyes that entered his vision near his leg. He jumped back a bit, but calmed down when he realized who it was.

"Shade," he said, panting. "Jesus Christ, you scared the hell out of me! Wait a minute!" he trailed off, as realization dawned in him. "Shade! You got out!"

Shade nodded, excitedly.

"Did you do that?" he asked, pointing to the hole.

Shade nodded. He sniffed Trent's leg, and looked at him apologetically.

"Don't worry about it," Trent replied. He tore his other, clean pant leg off and started wrapping it around the gash. "I'm just glad to see a friendly face. Say, is Matt with you?"

The dragon shook his head sadly.

"Okay," said Trent. "Well, once I'm done with this, let's go find him."

"You both have done an excellent job," said GLaDOS.

Trent sighed, and closed his eyes. "Does this bitch ever shut up?" he asked.

"You have successfully escaped your confinement. That was the real test all along. Now, we are throwing a party in your name. If you would just wait for a moment, an escort will arrive to take you to your party. There will be cake."

Trent finished dressing his wound, and struggled to his feet. He stumbled at first, but Shade caught him. "Thanks," he said. "I think we should just ignore her, by the way. Let's go find Matt instead."

GLaDOS was trying to kill him.

Matt had first realized this when he had completed the last test chamber. GLaDOS had congratulated him, and told him his testing was almost over. To make things worse, she had mentioned the cake. There would be no cake.

That was what GLaDOS did; she tricked her subjects into thinking that they would get out, and then killed them. The cake was her biggest trick. She would convince them that they were going to a party, when really, they were going to an incinerator.

The cake was a lie.

Then, when he had emerged from the elevator into his new test chambers, she brought in the turrets.

The turrets were Aperture Science's biggest killing machines. They shot whatever came into view, no matter what it was. Right now, Matt was hiding behind a wall, pinned by four of them, two on each side. If he moved, he would die.

"Are you still there?" one turret asked in its cute, child-like, sing-song voice.

After a few moments, the turrets gave up looking for him. Their red targeting beams went still, and they stopped talking.

Resisting the urge to panic, Matt dared a glance back. As soon as his head came into view, a turret's targeting laser snapped onto his head. _"I see you,"_ it said.

Cursing under his breath, Matt withdrew his head, just as a stream of bullets cut through the air. As soon as he disappeared from their sight, the shooting stopped.

"Could you come over here?"

He took a deep breath, and tried to calm himself, as he was trembling in fear. There was a way out of this; an easy one at that. He had the portal gun for a reason. All he had to do was keep himself together.

Why do I even bother? He thought. _I'm going to die anyway. What's the point?_

No. He couldn't think like that. There might still be a way out. He just had to keep going.

An idea came to him. He stuck his head and the portal gun around the wall and shot a portal directly above a turret's head. The targeting lasers found him, and he retreated behind the wall again, waiting for the shooting to stop.

When it was safe again, he stuck his gun around and shot the other portal beneath the other turret. It fell through and landed on the other, knocking them both over. The two of them went berserk. They vibrated and spun around on the floor, shooting everywhere. Matt ducked behind the wall, out of fear that he would be hit by a stray bullet.

Eventually, the turrets powered down. Two down, two to go.

The left side of the wall was clear now. He shot a portal at the far wall, and another at his wall, and stepped through it. Emerging behind the other two turrets, they were unable to detect him. He approached them from behind and picked one up.

_"__Please put me down," _it said.

"Sorry," Matt replied. "Can't." He threw it at the other and ran back through the portal as fast as he could. The two turrets fell over, and sprayed bullets everywhere.

_"__I don't blame you," _one of them said as it shut down.

Matt stood still for a moment, breathing heavily. Eventually, he forced himself to get up.

"Here I was, traveling with a Night Fury in a zombie-ridden wasteland, thinking I'd seen it all," he grumbled to himself. "Guess not."

Behind the two turrets was a hallway. He proceeded down it, hoping it would lead him out. But as he took the corner at the end of the hallway, he froze in place.

_"__Who's there?"_

He ducked back into the hallway as more bullets shot by. "Son of a bitch!" he yelled.

When the turret ceased fire, he spun around the corner and shot a portal at the wall behind the turret. Ducking back before it could shoot, he shot another at the wall in front of him and went through it, sneaking up behind the turret. With a swift kick, he sent it flying across the room, and ran before it started firing.

As he pressed onward, he came across an abnormally large storage cube lying on the ground. Ahead of it, he saw a disturbing sight.

Lined up against one wall were five turrets. In between them and him was an emancipation grid.

There was no way to take these turrets out. The grid saw to that; neither portals nor the cube could make it through. If Matt tried to get through himself, he would be shot to pieces.

He did the only thing he could do. He picked up the cube and crouched, using it as a shield.

Holding it in front of him, he took a deep breath. When he was ready, he stepped out into the turrets' line of fire.

The cube hid his presence from them. The turrets could only detect live targets, and if a target wasn't alive, they couldn't detect it, whether it was moving or not.

Matt held his breath as he made his way across the room. The exit to the chamber was right up ahead; he could see it. As long as he didn't mess this up, he would make it out of this test alive.

That was when he slipped.

His foot slid out from behind the cube; a perfect shot for the turrets. Quickly, he regained his balance and pulled his foot back, waiting.

The turrets' targeting lasers moved around. They had seen him, but couldn't find him again.

He waited until they gave up, and then kept moving. Eventually, he made it to the door and dropped the cube, running into the elevator as fast as he could.

_"Excellent," _GLaDOS commented. _"Your testing is nearly complete. One more, and then you may go to your party, where, I remind you, there will be cake."_

Matt's blood ran cold. His time was almost up; if he didn't find a way out now, he wasn't going to.

Trent and Shade had been wandering for a while. Trent had long since realized he had no idea where they were going, and was just following Shade. The dragon sniffed the floor, leading the way. Trent wasn't even sure if _he _knew what they were looking for anymore.

_"Do you even know where you're going?" _asked GLaDOS.

"Of course we do!" Trent yelled. He walked up to Shade. "Hey," he whispered in his ear. "Do you know where we're going?"

"I don't think you do. Because if you're trying to save your friend, you're going the wrong way."

Trent froze. He couldn't tell if she was telling the truth, or discouraging them.

"You've killed him. If just one of you had escaped, the other two could've lived on. But now that you've both escaped, I can't take any more chances. You leave me no choice but to have your friend incinerated. I'm sorry."

"No!" Trent yelled. "Don't you dare, you bitch!"

Shade roared with rage, shooting fire at the source of GLaDOS's voice. There were sparks, and metal showered from the ceiling.

He had destroyed the intercom.

"We have to find him," Trent resolved. "But where is he?"

Shade stared off into space, thinking. Then, his ears pricked up, and he ran back the way they had come.

"Hey!" Trent yelled after him. "Where are you going?"

Shade stopped, sat down, and gestured with his head for Trent to get on his back.

Trent ran over to him and did as the Night Fury asked. As soon as he got a hold on Shade's neck, the dragon bolted, running back the way they had come.

This was it.

Matt was in the final test chamber. He recognized it from the end of _Portal_. It was a long, twisting hallway, with a moving platform that transported you along it. The floor beneath the platform was completely covered with the deadly green gas.

There were a few obstacles in this chamber, but that wasn't the problem. The problem was where the chamber led. Instead of leading to an elevator, this chamber led to a giant furnace.

Matt looked around for an escape, but saw none. Legs trembling, he stepped onto the platform, and braced himself as it began moving across down the hallway. Directly up ahead was a panel of wall blocking his way. To the side was an alcove with a small red button in it. He hopped onto the alcove and pressed the button. As the panel slid away, he shot a portal through it, shot another at the wall in front of it, and hopped through. The panel slid shut just as he landed back on the platform.

The platform continued and reached a right turn. As it turned, Matt came face to face with the next obstacle. Up ahead, an energy ball was bouncing between the walls of the hallway.

_I can't duck under that, _ Matt realized.

He shot the orange portal at the wall next to him, waited for the platform to move away from it, and then shot the blue one at the wall where the ball was hitting it. The ball went through the portal, and came out behind him. Before it could come back, he moved the blue portal next to the orange one, so that the energy ball stayed away from him.

The platform made a left turn this time, and a chill ran up Matt's spine. Ahead of him, the walls turned brown, and attached to them was a sign with a picture of a cake on it.

_This is itâ€¦ _ he thought, his heart pounding. _It's now or never._

He thought back. This was exactly how GLaDOS tried to kill Chell in _Portal_. Beyond this corner would be a massive furnace, which the platform would carry him into. Hopefully, the walls of the furnace would be susceptible to portals. That would be the only way he could escape.

The platform turned the corner, and Matt saw it. The opening to the furnace was very small, but he knew from playing the games that it would widen eventually.

_"_Congratulations. The testing is now over. All Aperture technologies remain safely operational up to four thousand degrees Kelvin. Rest assured that there is no chance of a dangerous equipment malfunction prior to your victory candescence. Goodbye."_

The opening widened, and Matt froze in terror. The platform was descending right into a pit of fire, and the walls were _entirely portal-proof brown._

He began to panic, and frantically shot portals at the wall, trying to escape. Nothing worked. He was going to die.

Shaderan back down to where the elevator had crashed. He remembered seeing a sign that said, "Incinerator" back there. That was where he was going. He didn't know if that was really where GLaDOS was taking Matt. He didn't even know if GLaDOS was telling the truth about killing him. But he had to go anyway. If Matt died, wellâ€¦ He didn't want to think about it. He'd already lost one friend.

"Are you sure you know where you're going?" Trent asked from up on his back.

Shade nodded. He knew where he was going. In fact, he was almost there.

He turned a corner and was greeted by a staircase. After making sure Trent still had a good grip, he ran down the stairs as fast as he could, and emerged near the wreckage of the elevator.

"Holy shit!" Trent exclaimed when he saw the wreck. "Was that you?"

Shade nodded, as he turned into the hallway marked "Incinerator."

"Nice!" Trent commented.

Down the hallway was a staircase. Shade bounded up it, before arriving at a door three stories up. The words "Incinerator room" were printed on it.

Trent slid off Shade's back and tried to open the door. It was locked. "God damn it!" He cursed.

Suddenly, Shade had an idea. He pushed Trent back with his wing, and backed up himself, before producing a shot of fire from within his body. The fire ball hit the door and exploded, not only wrenching off of its hinges, but sending it flying halfway across the room beyond.

The two ran in and looked around the room. It was massive, and filled with scorching heat. They were on a balcony, overlooking a five-story chamber filled completely with fire. Towards the bottom, a platform was making its way into the fire.

Someone was on the platform. Shade squinted, and realized it was Matt. And he didn't have much time left.

Roaring, Shade jumped off of the balcony and dived towards the platform. GLaDOS must have been watching him, because fire began shooting from the walls as well. Shade was impervious to fire; GLaDOS couldn't kill him here. But she could still kill Matt.

Shade reached Matt seconds before the fire did, and wrapped his legs around his body. With all four of his legs, he embraced the teen, shielding him from the fire, and with a beat of his wings, he began rising back to the balcony.

Within seconds, it was all over. Shade reached the balcony and dropped Matt onto it, landing right beside him. Matt fell to the ground, trembling. Concerned, Shade nudged him with his head. "Matt," he said. "Are you okay?"

Trent walked over to them, and knelt over Matt. "You okay?" he asked.

"I'm alive," Matt replied.

"Well, that's a good sign," Trent chuckled. He held out his hand. "Need a hand?"

Matt grabbed his hand and got to his feet. "Thanks," he said. "Both of you. I thought I was dead." He patted Shade on the head.

"I was scared you would be for a second," said Trent. "Man, let me tell you, Shade here is a tank. He completely destroyed an elevator and rescued me."

"Yeah, he'll do that," said Matt. He smiled at the dragon.

"Now, if you don't mind, let's save the conversations for later," said Trent. "We've got an AI to kill."

Connecting

Connection Made

Communicatingâ€|

Sending Messageâ€|

Priority: High

Security Level: Classified

The test subjects have escaped. Most likely, they will not be able to do any damage, but these ones are smart and dangerous. Especially the Night Fury. In the case of the improbable, I request that you come as soon as you can. Without me, your operation will crumble to dust. Think about that.

Message sent.

* * *

><p>So, let me know what you think! I'll be back with the conclusion of this trilogy of chapters on Sunday!

In the meantime, as of tomorrow there will only be fifty more days until the release of How to Train Your Dragon 2. I can't fucking wait.

14. Chapter Thirteen: Want You Gone

Alright guys, this is it! The end of the trilogy of Portal-related chapters!

Warning: There is a really graphic torture scene in this one. I'll put a warning right before it, so if you have triggers, skip it.

****Other than that, I hope you enjoy!****

****Disclaimer: I do not own HTTYD or Portal****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter Thirteen:

****Want You Gone****

****Location Unknown****

"So," said Trent. "Where are we going?"

Matt looked around. "That," he said, "Is a good question."

He looked up and saw an opening at the top of the room that led off into a mess of pipes and machinery. Thinking back to the ending of Portal, he recognized it. "If I'm right, that should lead us somewhere," he said, pointing to it. "Shade, do you think you can get us up there?"

Shade nodded and crouched, allowing Matt and Trent to climb onto his back. When they were safely on top of him, he took off and flew up to the room.

_"Do you really think you can escape?" _GLaDOS asked. _"You could spend years trying to find an exit route in here. Is it really worth it?"_

"Ignore her," said Matt. "She's trying to get inside our heads."

"I'm not trying to do anything. I'm simply stating the truth. To be honest, I'm not even sure why you are trying to escape. Don't you want cake?"

"No. There is no cake."

"Sure there is. Why would I lie?"

They ignored her. Matt and Trent slid off of Shade's back, and they proceeded down a hallway. Lining the hallway walls were several pipelines and strange mechanisms.

_"Dragon," _said GLaDOS. _"You're smart. I know you are. And I know you can understand me. Why are you going with them? I've offered you a way out, and yet you choose to pursue an impossible goal with theseâ€| humans."_

"Don't listen to her, Shade," said Matt. "She's lying."

"I know," said Shade replied. He nodded so Matt could understand.

_"Am I the one who's lying?" _asked GLaDOS. _"Or is it him? Think, dragon. You remember what the humans did to you, do you not? You know they can't be trusted."_

"Noâ€|" said Shade. "No, you're wrong!" _Don't let her in,_ he told

himself.

He didn't doubt Matt's loyalty, and GLaDOS's words weren't shaking his trust. But they were stirring up memories again.

I can't take much more of this, he thought.

"You remember what they did, don't you?"

"Shut up!"

"They were all the same. They all tortured your kind for their own selfish purposes. What makes you think these two are any different?"

I know Matt! He's different, I know he is. Those humans are all dead. Memories, nothing more.

"Shut up," he said, more forcibly this time.

"Never once did they view you as what you know you really are; an equal. And whenever you tried to fight for your freedom, well, you know what happened then, don't you?"

No! Don't think about it!

"Shut up!"

"You don't want to go back to that, do you? Cause it'll happen. Just remember. All that bad stuff? It'll come back."

At this point, Shade was starting to tremble. All of the horrible memories that he had kept bottled up inside for months were coming back. He clenched his eyes closed, fighting them off.

"Shade!" said Matt. "Ignore her. Block her out. She's trying to trick you."

"Don't fight it, 'Shade.'"

It was those words that finally broke through his wall. He lost all control of his emotions.

"SHUT UP!" he roared. "SHUT! UP!" He fired a shot at the ceiling, hoping to destroy anything that GLaDOS might be using to watch or communicate with them. With a flap of his wings, he flew towards the ceiling, clawing and tearing at whatever he could see.

"Shade! Calm down!" Matt yelled.

His words didn't reach him. Shade felt satisfaction as his claws ripped through a speaker on the ceiling, tearing it out and severing the wires. He noticed a camera on the other side of the room, and shot a bolt of fire at it. It exploded in sparks, and a tremor shot through the hallway. Suddenly, a chunk of the ceiling broke away, jolting Shade out of his rage, and he regained control of his body.

Oh no! he thought. _What have I done?_

More of the ceiling began crumbling away. "Run!" Trent yelled.

The three of them sprinted down the hallway, Shade running slightly ahead. Behind them, a trail of destruction followed. When Shade realized it was outrunning them, he stopped. The others ran up to him and stopped as well. "What are you doing?" Matt yelled.

Shade whirled around and faced the collapsing hallway. He snapped his wings open and used them to shield the two humans, and with his head he motioned for them to keep going. He warbled apologetically.

"No!" Matt yelled. "I'm not leaving you!"

Shade was about to respond, when a chunk of ceiling hit him, and he blacked out.

****December 5th, 2013****

He was woken by the sound of a door crashing open.

Shade knew what it was. The scientists were taking someone else now. He remained as he was, pretending to be asleep in the hopes that they would ignore him.

The sound of their footsteps approached his cage, and his heartbeat quickened. Then, they stopped. He heard the jingling of keys right next to his cage.

Noâ€|

He snapped his eyes open, and saw that the scientists were unlocking Ashmore's cage. "Ashmore," he said.

"Hey," his friend replied. "Don't worry about me. I'll be okay. You were, right?"

Shade stood up and walked over to the cage wall. "I won't let them take you," he said.

"Come on," said a scientist, impatiently.

"You have to," said Ashmore. "I'm sorry."

Shade was silent, trying to hold his emotions inside. He failed.

"No!" He roared. A scientist tried to enter Ashmore's cage, and Shade clawed at him.

"Jesus Christ!" the scientist exclaimed. "We've got a fighter here."

Other scientists entered the room, and put a sack over Ashmore's head. Growling ferociously, Shade slashed his paw through a gap in the cage mesh, and almost hit one of the scientists.

"Everyone, back off!" said the head scientist. They all backed to other side of the cage, out of Shade's reach.

"What are you doing?" Ashmore asked. "Stop, before they take you

too!"

"No!" Shade growled.

"Now," said one of the scientists. "We can do this the easy way, or the hard way. We can take your friend, and you can let him come quietly, and we'll let you off the hook this one time, or," he paused for effect, "You can keep fighting, and we can punish you."

"I'd rather be punished than abandon my only friend," Shade spat. At this, he shot a bolt of fire in front of the scientist's feet.

"Shit!" one of them yelled, startled.

"Okay, that's it," said the scientist. He stepped forward and produced a gun.

Shade backed up as the scientist began to aim, and charged another shot in his throat. As he was about to shoot it, however, the scientist pulled the trigger, and something drove its way into his flesh.

He swallowed the shot and looked down. A small, black dart was sticking out of the scales in his chest. He began to feel dizzy, and looked back up at the scientists.

Whimpering, he fell to the floor and blacked out.

****WARNING: TORTURE SCENE AHEAD****

He awoke in a small, dimly lit room.

Shade tried to lift his head, but he felt resistance. He realized he was strapped in and muzzled, and instantly became alert.

Memories of what had happened came back to him. All he could think of was Ashmore. He knew what the scientists were capable of, and was terrified of what would happen to his friend.

This train of thought eventually led to his current position. He didn't know where he was, or what was about to happen.

Okay, just keep calm, he told himself. _What more can they do to you?_

Observing the room he was in, he saw that it was small, and the walls were brown. A single light bulb dangled from the ceiling. Right in front of him was a door.

Just then, the door opened, and three security guards carrying batons walked in. They were wearing black uniforms and balaclavas.

Shade shied away as best as he could in his bound state. Either the guards didn't notice, or they just ignored it.

One the guards shut the door, and they all turned to stare at him. "You know why you're here, right?" asked another, who seemed to be in control. Without waiting for an answer of any kind, the guard brought the baton down as hard as he could on the shin of Shade's right

foreleg.

There was a crack, and Shade roared with pain. His bones were stronger than a human's, so it hadn't been completely fractured, but damage had been done.

"You've been naughty, my friend," said the guard. There was a sadistic gleam in his eye, as he lifted the baton again. With a powerful stroke, he swung it back onto the same leg, breaking the bone.

It hurt so much he wasn't able to form a conscious thought. All he was aware of was the pain and the overwhelming need to get away. He roared in sheer agony.

"Oh stop that," the guard said. He brought his baton down on Shade's other foreleg, cracking it. "Nobody is going to help you. Nobody cares."

It went on like this until all of Shade's legs were broken, and he felt lost in a vortex of pain.

The guard bent down and looked Shade in the eye. "Now," he said. "You won't do that again, will you?"

The dragon weakly shook his head.

"Good," said the guard. "I'm glad we had this talk." He produced a syringe and slid it in between the scales on Shade's shoulder.

When the injection was complete, Shade began to feel himself slip away. The last thing he was aware of was the guard saying, "Take him to the infirmary."

****END OF SCENE****

He awoke several hours later, on a large mattress. Once again, he had tubes attached to him. This time, he had several casts on his body as well. All four of his legs were broken, and several of his ribs had been cracked. His wing bones were fractured, he was bruised all over, and many of his scales had fallen out.

At first, he wasn't able to move without his wounds hurting. For the first week, he simply lay there, sleeping. After a week, he painfully managed to roll himself over, and what he saw made his heart sink.

Ashmore was on a mattress next to him, hooked up to even more tubes. Shade couldn't see it, but he could tell his friend was in a bad condition.

His only guess was that Corvus had performed the same test on Ashmore that he had on him. The knowledge made him tremble at the implications. He had barely survived. Ashmore might not be so lucky.

Over the next two weeks, Shade stayed by Ashmore's side. The doctors saw to both of them, and even though Shade could move to his cage if he needed to, they kept him in the infirmary. It would have been too hard to move him, as he would have resisted. He spent his time

watching over Ashmore, praying that he would pull through.

After several days, he did.

The doctors were examining Shade at the time, when a sensor attached to Ashmore went off. The doctors immediately went to his side, and something wonderful happened.

Ashmore opened his eyes.

At first, nothing seemed to register to him. Then, he blinked in confusion.

The doctors were barking orders, removing tubes, and examining his vital signs. Ashmore's eyes darted around the room, before finally resting on Shade. They widened in shock.

"Two-nineâ€|" he whispered weakly. "What happened to youâ€|?"

"We'll talk when they leave," Shade replied, barely able to contain his excitement. Ashmore was alive!

When the doctors finally left, Ashmore had slipped back into unconsciousness. _Damn itâ€| _Shade thought. _I really wanted to talk to him._

A couple of hours later, when Shade was asleep, he woke up to the sound of Ashmore weakly calling his name.

"Are you okay?" was the first thing he said.

"I've felt better," Ashmore replied.

"What did they do to you?"

"Same thing they did to you."

Shade was speechless. Rage filled him. "Noâ€|" he breathed. "They didn't. Oh, when I get out of here, Corvus better hope he doesn't cross my path-"

"Do you really still think we can get out?" Ashmore cut him off.

Shade paused. "Yes. Yes I do. If you survived that too, I think we can do anything."

Ashmore was silent for a moment. "Okay," he said. "What's the plan?"

"Wellâ€| The thing isâ€| I was hoping you could help me with that," Shade replied.

"I might be able to help. But first, I want to know what happened to you."

Shade told him about the beating, and Ashmore's eyes widened in horror. "So that's what happens to all those Night Furiesâ€|" he said.

"I don't really want to dwell on it," said Shade. "I'm just glad we're both alive, and I want to stay that way."

The two dragons talked for another hour or so, and then went back to sleep. For the first time in a while, they slept in comfort, knowing that they were both okay.

****Present Day****

Shade awoke with a heavy weight pressing down on him.

He remembered what had happened, and frantically shook the sleep out of his head. As he was doing this, he realized that his body was covered in rubble. After gathering his strength, he pushed against the rubble, and felt it slide off of him as he emerged from it. He looked around and observed his surroundings.

He was in the hallway, only he was looking down the way he had come. Behind him was a slanting pile of rubble that led through a hole in the ceiling to the floor above. Matt and Trent were nowhere in sight. Frantically, he began digging through the rubble, hoping to find his friends.

As he was doing this, he heard what sounded like a muffled voice from the other side of the rubble pile. He froze, and his ears pricked as he listened. The voice came again, and with relief he realized it was Matt.

"Shade!" he called. "Is that you?"

Shade warbled as loud as he could, hoping he would be heard.

For a moment, there was no reply. Then, "Thank God. I thought we had lost you. Don't worry; it's only been a few minutes. Is there a way for you to get through this?"

Shade assumed that if the floor above connected to their side of the rubble as well, they would have used it already. So, he started digging through the rubble. It wasn't long before he came across huge chunks of brick and metal, wedged so well together that even he couldn't move it.

"I can't do it!" Shade called.

Seeing as Matt could only guess at what Shade was saying, he said, "I'll take that as a no. Hold on, let me think..."

For about a minute, there was no sound except the faint, indiscernible sounds of Matt and Trent talking. And then, Matt shared their plan.

"You're not going to like this," said Matt. "But I think it's our only choice. You need to get out of the testing areas. Find the cure, and get back to Brian. His life is in your hands now. If he's even still alive. Me and Trent will continue this way and kill GLaDOS, because I have a feeling that's where this path leads. And besides, we've been talking, and we think she might know something about what Trent's looking for. If we succeed, we'll get back to Manchester within the week. If we don't, well—we won't."

Shade took a moment to let this sink in. His best friend was asking him to leave him to die? No! No, he couldn't do it. He roared, attempting to get his disapproval across.

"Look, I know this is hard for you," said Matt. "But you need to go! Now!"

Shade didn't want to leave his friends. But, the more he thought about it, the more it made sense! Send someone ahead to get the cure to Brian early. Or, if he was already dead, confirm it. But still! He didn't think he could live with himself if Matt and Trent died because he wasn't there.

But there was no way to get to them.

He tried to shoot a bolt of fire at the rubble, but it had no effect. Anger and desperation filled him. Why had he lost control like that? He had just jeopardized their lives, and forced them to split up! He couldn't leave; not after that. If something happened to them because of him, he knew wouldn't be able to live with himself.

But it seemed he had no choice.

Unless! _

Slowly, a plan formed in his head. He grinned to himself as he decided what he would do. He would split up with them! but he wouldn't find his way out. No, he would find a way back to them.

Yes! he thought. I like this plan.

"Shade! For the last time! Go!"

"But!" Shade whimpered in mock desperation. "Fine." He began climbing over the rubble, flapping his wings to give him a boost. When he reached the floor above, he emerged in a similar hallway. He took one last look back, and then continued.

Sometime later, Matt and Trent were still making their way through the laboratories. GLaDOS had been throwing various obstacles at them- breaking machinery, shutting doors, deploying turrets- but they were able to make it past all of them. Now, they arrived in a huge, multi-story chamber, with trenches lining the floor. Here was where they found themselves.

"This one's simple," Trent commented. They could see the wall of the room above from in the trenches, and Trent shot his blue portal at it. Then, he shot his orange portal at the wall next to him and stepped through. Matt followed him.

The room had several pillars holding up the ceiling. Along the walls were several electronic doors about the size of a car, spaced at random intervals at various heights.

"Oh shit!" Matt cursed.

"What?" asked Trent.

"I remember this!"

Suddenly, a loud blare sounded throughout the room, and the doors started to open. When they were about half open, several red lasers appeared and snapped onto the two men.

"Move!" Matt yelled. He dived towards one wall, behind a pillar that was attached to it. Bullets began flying, but he was lucky; he made it to the pillar without being shot, and the red lasers lost him. Trent was right behind him, and they squeezed into the wall as tightly as they could, panting.

"Holy shit," Trent cursed. "Got any ideas?"

"One," said Matt, as he looked into the door nearest them. It was on the ground, and he could see the wall of the room beyond. "It's a bad one, though."

"It'll have to do," said Trent. "Just do it!"

Matt shot his blue portal at the wall, and the orange one behind him. The turret saw him, and the red laser snapped onto him as he jumped through. It didn't fire in time, however, and he was able to pick it up and throw it out of the room, tipping it over and disabling it.

"Come on!" he yelled at Trent. Trent jumped through the portal and looked around.

They were in a small, gray room with no opening save for the door. Looking outside, they assessed their situation.

"Several doors, all over the room," said Trent. "Various locations, some higher up than others. It looks like there's one turret per room."

"Okay. We'll split up and meet back up once they're all dead. Ready?" Matt asked.

"Sure," said Trent. He gripped his portal gun. "Let's go."

They both shot their portals at two different rooms. Then, they shot their other portals at the wall next to them, and stepped through. Over the next few minutes, they kept doing this, clearing out every room and throwing the turrets out, until finally, there was only one left.

The one all the way at the top of the room was much harder. There was no clear shot at it. In fact, Matt couldn't even see it; it was directly above him.

"Trent!" he yelled. "Come over here!"

Trent shot his portals and joined Matt. "Do you have a plan?"

"Yeah," Matt replied. "But it's risky. I'm going to go first, and I want you to watch carefully. I only have one chance, and if this works, you're going to have to do it too. Okay?"

"Alright."

Matt took a deep breath, and stepped over to the door. They were two stories above the ground now, and another two stories up was the top. He could see it from where he was, and he shot his blue portal. Then, he shot an orange portal on the wall next to him, and stepped into it, making sure to keep his feet halfway in the room.

He extended his arm forward so that the portal gun was all the way through. He could see the turret's room from here, and had a clear shot. Aiming, he started to squeeze the trigger.

The turret's target laser snapped onto his chest.

"Shit!" he yelled. Startled, he lost his balance and fell forward.

Immediately, he shot a portal at the floor beneath him. He fell through the portal and went flying across the room, into the turret's chamber. Bullets were flying, and just barely missing him, as he picked up the turret and threw it out of the room.

As it deactivated on the floor far below, Matt yelled down to Trent. "Hey! Do you think you can do that?"

"I guess!" Trent replied. "Only one way to find out, right?"

He shot the portal at the wall opposite them, and repeated the process Matt had just gone through. Matt couldn't help but laugh as he screamed on the way down from the portal, and during his flight through the air.

When he landed, he stumbled forward a few steps before regaining his balance. Panting, he asked, "Now what?"

Matt pointed across the room, higher up. There was an exit two stories up, and Matt could see a wall suitable for portal-making. "We get up there," he said. He shot his portals and stepped through them, appearing at the exit.

"Come on!" he yelled.

Trent followed him through, and they continued down the hallway beyond. As they walked forward, two turrets suddenly fell from the ceiling, landing perfectly. Instantly, they became aware of the two humans.

"Get down!" Matt yelled. They both dove behind mechanisms protruding from the wall and used them as cover. When the bullets stopped, Matt said, "Trent. Shoot a portal under each of the turrets' feet. That'll knock them over."

Trent did as he was told, and shot his portals. The turrets knocked into each other, and spewed a spray of bullets before finally shutting down.

"Is the coast clear?" Matt asked.

Trent risked a glance. "Yeah. I think so," he said.

"Okay. Let's go."

They continued. There were other, minor obstacles, but for a while there were no turrets. Matt couldn't stop thinking of Shade. He hoped the dragon was okay.

Eventually, they turned a corner into yet another chamber, and Trent's face instantly lit up. "Oh yeah!" He exclaimed. "Our day just got a lot better."

"What?" Matt asked. Then, he saw it.

It was a storage room. And right in the middle of it was their guns and backpacks.

"What are the odds?" Matt asked.

"I don't know," said Trent. He stepped forward, but Matt held him back. He had a bad feeling.

"I don't trust this," he said. He picked up a piece of rubble that was lying on the floor, and tossed it at the backpacks.

Nothing.

"It seems safe," said Trent. "But you're right; we should be careful."

Cautiously, they approached the backpacks. Nothing happened. They reached them, and even went as far as to go through their contents and make sure that no surprises awaited them. But they found nothing.

"Sweet," said Trent. "Looks like she screwed up. And now we have guns."

"Yep," Matt replied. "Let's go. She's still alive, and that's something we need to fix."

Shade was close to the top. He could feel it.

Once he had gotten back in range, GLaDOS continued her verbal taunting. She had also sent some turrets to kill him, but he had disposed of them easily. He ignored GLaDOS's taunts; they had done all the damage that they would do.

Eventually, she just gave up.

He was now in an area that looked much like where they had been before GLaDOS had taken them. Although he had planned on meeting up with Matt and Trent, he had traveled in an upward direction, because that was the only way he could go. And now, here he was, walking down yet another hallway. But this one was different.

He came across a room with an open door, and poked his head in. Inside, he saw what he had been looking for. A map.

Squeezing through the doorway, he studied the map carefully. He found the incinerator where he had saved Matt- on the bottom floor- and used it to find the location where they had split up. Using this

knowledge, he traced the path Matt and Trent were on as far as he could.

Matt was right. It led right to GLaDOS's chamber.

It was marked on the map. The room was huge, and Shade could only guess what was inside. He made up his mind. That would be where he would meet them. And together, they would kill GLaDOS once and for all.

Next, he found the location of the Containment Center- where he remembered the cure was located- for future reference. When he found it, he proceeded to find his location on the map, and trace a path to GLaDOS. As he was memorizing it, however, he saw something else.

Several strange markings that lined the walls of certain chambers were especially abundant in GLaDOS's chamber. Shade checked the key to see what they were, and froze.

They were neurotoxin emitters.

Trent and Matt were walking right into a death trap.

Without hesitation, Shade ran back into the hallway and followed the path he had memorized. He had to reach GLaDOS's chamber, before it was too late!

"Whoa," said Trent. "This thing is huge."

They were looking out a window towards into a massive chamber. The bottom was several stories below, and there was another room suspended by supports in the middle. An enclosed bridge led from them to the room.

"That's her," Matt replied. "We've made it."

They walked up a few steps to their left, and opened a door into the hallway. As they walked, Trent asked, "You think these guns will work on her?"

"I don't know," Matt replied.

"What happens if they don't?"

"I don't know."

They walked in silence after that. Matt was nervous. Very nervous. There was no guarantee that they wouldn't be blown up as soon as they entered.

They reached the electronic door at the end of the hallway and waited, holding their breath. Eventually, it slid open, and Trent gasped.

Inside was GLaDOS's true form, staring right at them.

She was a large, robotic figure that was attached to the ceiling through a series of black pipes and wires. These mechanisms allowed her to rotate and move as she pleased. Along her "body" was several

white plates that looked a lot like armor, all forming a shape that somewhat looked like a torso. Her "head" was white, and resembled the shape of a half-wheel. In the center of her "face" was a single orange eye.

_"Well. Here you are at last," _She greeted. _"Come on in."_

Matt and Trent cautiously stepped inside. At once, the door slid shut behind them.

"I must admit, it was rather fun watching you get here. But, you've come far enough. This is the end of the line."

"Wait," said Trent. "Please, before you kill us, may I ask you something?"

"What are you doing?" Matt whispered.

"I need to know if she knows anything about the zombies," Trent replied.

_"Hmmmâ€¦!" _GLaDOS seemed to be considering his request. Finally, she said, _"You may ask a question. But I may or may not answer it."_

"I heard that somewhere in New Hampshire is a hidden laboratory. Do you know where this is?"

The sound of GLaDOS's laughter filled the room. _"I take it you're searching for the Machine too?"_

"You know where it is?" Trent asked, excited.

_"No," _GLaDOS replied.

"Oh," said Trent, disappointed.

"But, I know who does."

"Who?" asked Trent frantically. "Who is it?"

"The one who came before. They knew. They knew exactly where it was."

"You mean that asshole who ambushed us?"

"I don't see how it matters who it is. You will never find them, because you will never leave."

Behind them, a clunking noise announced that the door was being locked.

"Wait!" Matt exclaimed. "Can't we talk this over?"

"The time for talking has passed. Now, it's time for killing. Enjoy your last few minutes as you die a slow death from a deadly neurotoxin."

As she said that, several hissing noises came from vents scattered across the ceiling. A timer popped up on a screen attached to one of the walls, counting down from five minutes.

"Open fire," said Trent.

Together, they fired their guns at GLaDOS, hoping to kill her. But to their dismay, the bullets merely bounced off of her and flew off in random directions.

"Do you really think that I don't have defenses against such puny weapons?" GLaDOS taunted.

"Go to hell!" Trent yelled. He shot a few more bullets just to piss the AI off. Suddenly, however, a few sparks appeared about halfway up her body.

"What was that?" Trent asked, surprised. "Did I hit her?"

Matt looked closely, and recognized a personality core. He remembered those from Portal. It was personality cores that made GLaDOS what she was. If you got rid of them, GLaDOS would be severely weakened, maybe even dead- and Trent had gotten a lucky shot into the one place where GLaDOS wasn't bulletproof. The thin opening where the personality core was attached. It still clung to the AI's body, but it had been dislodged slightly.

"You hit her core!" Matt exclaimed. "Shoot it again!"

"I highly advise you not to do that," said GLaDOS. "You don't know what destroying that might do. I can assure you, bad things will happen. Maybe not just to you, either. Think about your friend, Shade. He might be in danger because of you. You don't want to hurt him, do you?"

"Don't listen to her," said Matt. "She's desperate."

They began shooting at the core.

Almost immediately, holes in the ground opened, and large, mounted turrets rose from them. These ones were different, however. They shot rockets instead of bullets, which made them more powerful. While they were much less accurate, they were still definitely a force to be reckoned with.

"Move!" Matt yelled. "Don't stop! Those things can kill you with one hit!"

They ran, dodging rockets and shooting at GLaDOS when they had the chance. All the while, the neurotoxin kept pumping into the room, and they felt their strength start to ebb away.

Three minutes after the countdown began, Trent finally scored the shot that knocked the core out of its socket. There was a shower of sparks, and the core fell from GLaDOS's body. Matt ran over to it and picked it up. It looked exactly like the one from Portal; it was a cube with a moving, purple "eye" in the center.

"Destroying that will have no effect on me," said GLaDOS. "In fact, it will probably just hurt you even more. Why don't you leave it alone?"

Matt ignored her, and saw that one section of the floor rose up from

the rest, and was covered with a metal seal. Next to it was a button. He ran over to it and pressed it, and the seal opened, revealing a pit of fire.

He hurled the core into the fire, and there was a shudder. A sound came from GLaDOS; a sound that almost sounded like an inhuman scream.

"That hurt her!" Trent yelled. "Quick, let's get the other ones!"

Matt nodded, and ran back towards GLaDOS, dodging another rocket in the process. Curiously, he looked at the timer, and froze.

They only had a minute and a half left.

"Trent," he said.

Trent didn't hear him. He was shooting at GLaDOS, and the sound of the bullets drowned out his voice.

"Trent!" he yelled.

"What?"

"We don't have enough time!"

Just as he said that, he was hit by what felt like a wall of fatigue. Losing his balance, he collapsed to his knees, a rocket just barely missing him.

"We're out of time," he said weakly.

Shade reached the hallway that led to GLaDOS's chamber, and saw that the door was open. _Would GLaDOS, or anything else that might be in here, have left that open? Probably not, _Shade thought. _They must've gotten here already. I just hope it's not too late._

He ran down the hallway and reached the door on the other side. It didn't open.

"I don't have time for this!" he growled. Using all of his strength, he smashed into the door.

The room shuddered.

Instantly, the turrets stopped firing, and turned towards the door.

"What's going on?" Trent asked weakly. By now, he had fallen to the ground too.

There was no response from GLaDOS. Instead, there was another shudder. The door seemed to buck inwards a little, and Matt thought he saw a crack starting to make its way up the side.

There's only one person who could do that kind of damage, he thought. _And that's Shade._

It didn't surprise him that the dragon hadn't tried to escape after

all. Shade would never willingly leave him to die.

The door shuddered again, and the crack grew wider. Matt looked at the clock. One minute. His vision was starting to blur.

And suddenly, the door burst open.

Matt held his breath as Shade flew through the door at top speed. The turrets fired, but the Night Fury outsped them easily. He flew right into GLaDOS, and gripped her frame with his claws. She whipped her body around, trying to shake him off, but it was no use.

Shade began ripping fiercely. With his claws, he severed the links to all three of the remaining cores, and dropped them to the ground. The turrets didn't dare fire at him, for fear of killing GLaDOS. He was unstoppable.

Fifty seconds left. GLaDOS was almost finished. Finally, Shade struck the final blow, by digging his claws into a small gap where her head connected with the rest of her frame, and pulling. It took some effort, but with a shower of sparks, it fell off, and GLaDOS was dead.

The turrets powered down, the hissing noise that signaled the neurotoxin's presence stopped, and the screen on which the timer was displayed powered down. A few seconds later, it came back up, with a warning stating that the labs only had enough backup power to last for two hours without GLaDOS.

Matt hoped that would be enough time for them to escape.

Shade flew down to them, dug his claws into their shirts, and lifted them up. He flew them out of the room, and down the hallway, to where the air was clean. When he landed, he gently placed them down, and warbled in concern.

"Don't worry, bud," said Matt. "We're okay, thanks to you."

"I thought you were leaving," said Trent.

Shade shook his head.

"You shouldn't have come back for us. But thanks."

After a minute or so, Matt and Trent had enough strength to walk again. With Shade in the lead, they made their way back to the top floor, and found the Containment center. There were three doses of the cure left. Each was stored in a syringe with a layer of hard, protective plastic covering the needle. It was in liquid form; it was crystal clear, and looked like water.

Matt reached out and touched one of them. It almost didn't seem real. They had finally made it.

"That was much harder than it should have been," he said.

"Tell me about it," Trent said. "I just want to leave and never come to a lab again."

"So why are there only three?" Matt asked.

"He must have taken the cures," said Trent, as if reading his mind. "We may want to consider adding that to our list of reasons why we need to find him."

Shade tilted his head questioningly.

"That bastard who jumped us earlierâ€¦ We think he knows where the thing Trent's looking for is," Matt explained.

"Whether he does or notâ€¦ I need to know. I'm going to find him, and I'd love it if you two helped."

"Maybe," Matt replied. "But right now, we need to see if it's not too late to save Brian."

"Right."

They removed three of the cures and put them in Trent's backpack, putting them in a position where they wouldn't be crushed. Then, they made their way back to the elevator and exited Aperture Laboratories.

Outside, as Trent was climbing onto Shade's back, the hair on the back of his neck stood up. He felt eyes on him. Someone was watching. Looking into the woods behind him, he couldn't see anything.

But that didn't mean there was nothing there.

"What's wrong?" Matt asked.

"Nothing," Trent lied. "Let's go."

Shade took off, and they flew back in the direction of Harristown. It was a bittersweet moment. They were finally free, but that didn't mean they had won yet.

None of them noticed the gray van following them on the road below.

* * *

><p>Well, let me know what you guys think! And I'll see you again Wednesday!

15. Chapter Fourteen: School Slaughter

Sorry for the delay, guys! This is a long chapter, and I had a hard time getting it done on time. I think after this week I'm going to go back to only releasing chapters on Sundays until the school year is over (mid-June).

Anyway, as you may have noticed, there was an error in the last chapter. I referred to the character Dr. Corvus as Dr. Martinez. That was his original name back when this fanfiction was just a thing for me and my friends; I changed it because I like Corvus better. I forgot to edit that into Chapter Thirteen, though. The error has been spotted and corrected.

****Anyway, while the Portal Trilogy is over, the bigger sub-plot it was a part of hasn't been concluded yet, and this chapter will take us closer to that conclusion. I hope you enjoy it!****

* * *

<p>Chapter Fourteen:

****School Slaughter****

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

****Time since infection: 19 hours****

"This should be good," said Ben.

They had just finished fortifying room 611 so that Brian would be safe if the zombies got into the school. They both knew it was probably a lost cause, but they didn't want to take any chances. Both of them had seen too many movies.

"Okay," said Joey. "Nowâ€¦ Where could there be ammoâ€¦?"

"Look everywhere," said Ben. "You never know. Someone might have tried to stay here but then gotten very, very, unlucky."

They began searching all of the rooms they could. As far as they knew, the zombies hadn't noticed them yet, and they wanted to keep it that way. So, they searched the rooms on the other side of the school first.

They got lucky. In room 209, they found the bloody remains of a person who had quite apparently called it quits. Their dried blood crusted the wall behind them, and a shotgun was pointed into what used to be his mouth.

"Ouch," said Ben. "Know him?"

"How the hell would I know? I can't tell who it is," Joey replied. "Let's just make this quick. This is grossing me out."

Ben searched the room, especially the man's pocket, and found five clips of ammo for the gun, as well as three for his magnum that he carried.

"Jeez, this guy was loaded," Joey commented. "Why'd he opt out?"

"He must have lost hope," Ben replied. "A bullet to the head is a better death than being ripped apart."

"I guessâ€¦" Joey trailed off. "This is making me sick. Can we leave?"

They left, and searched more of the school. In a few other rooms, they found spare ammo lying around, usually next to patches of dried blood, and sometimes body parts.

Seeing all of this made Joey think back to the horrible things that had happened on Z-Day. There had been fighting, lots of fighting, in the school. The police had tried to intervene, and save as many

students as they could, but a lot of them were killed.

That must be where all of these body parts and ammo are coming from, Joey thought.

His mind wandered back, to the beginning of all the trouble, to Z-Dayâ€|

****March 14****th****, 2014****

It had all started fifth period. The day was half over, and it was a Friday. Joey was sitting in his creative writing class in the 600 hallway, waiting for the bell to ring and the period to begin.

He liked his creative writing class. The teacher would come in and give them a prompt, and they would spend the class writing. Then, at the end, whoever wanted to share would. The results were sometimes funny, sometimes serious, and almost always enjoyable.

The bell rang, and the teacher walked in and shut the door. His name was Mr. Leroy. He was really tall, yet skinny, and had short, black hair. He was fairly young; he looked to be in his early thirties at most.

Mr. Leroy. introduced that day's prompt. It was one he did often; he would read one of his poems to the class, and they would each pick their favorite line. Then, they would each incorporate that line into a writing piece. Other than that one line, the pieces were entirely original.

He read his poem to the class. Then, he sat down, and let the class write their prompts.

Joey thought hard. There was one line he had really liked, butâ€| He wasn't sure how to put it into a writing piece.

Something flickered in the back of his mind; the beginning of some idea. Mentally, he chased after it, attempting to pin it down and turn into inspiration.

Piece by piece, his idea came together, and he began writing. Before he knew it, he had written out the beginning of what was looking to be an excellent poem.

While he was writing, his thoughts wandered. He had lunch next. As he thought that, he realized he was hungry. Thoughts of food came to him, and his hunger grew worse. Pushing away the thoughts, he focused on his piece again.

Minutes passed. He wrote and wrote, and the clock ticked away. He was about halfway done, and was trying to think about what he would write next. Before long, his thoughts wandered again, this time to the weekend ahead.

Sam was coming to visit that night, and was staying the weekend. Matt was getting back from Colorado on Saturday, and on Sunday the three of them, plus Brian, Will, and Rob were meeting for another PokÃ©mon tournament.

Joey thought back to their first tournament, back in 2011. It was

over Christmas vacation, before Sam had moved, and it had been a type tournament. A type tournament was when every contestant was assigned a type at random and had to build a team of five PokÃ©mon that were of that type, and one that wasn't. Joey had had poison. He smiled as he remembered how God, his Snorlax, had swept almost everyone else's teams.

He shook his head, jolting himself out of the stream of memories. Reminiscing was nice, but he had work to do.

As he put his pencil to the paper and began writing again, the lockdown alarm sounded throughout the school. Everyone immediately began putting their stuff down and standing up from their desks.

Mr Leroy. stood up and made his way to the door. "Alright, you're all Seniors, you know the drill," he said as he shut and locked the door. He covered the window on it with a piece of paper, turned off the lights, and then stepped into the corner on the other side of the room, where everyone else was gathering and nobody looking through the door window could see.

The room was silent, except for the whispers that accompanied Mr. Leroy. taking attendance. _Great, now I'm losing writing time,_ Joey thought in annoyance. _All so they can do a stupid lockdown drill._

Once Mr. Leroy. was done taking attendance, they waited in silence. And waited, and waited. Ten minutes passed, and nothing happened.

Something didn't feel right. Lockdown drills never lasted this long.

Maybe this isn't a drill after allâ€¦ he thought.

And then he heard it.

In the distance, he heard the faint sound of screaming.

A chill ran up his spine. _It's real, _he thought. _Shit, this is badâ€¦_ This is really badâ€¦_

Nervous murmurs ran throughout the classroom. "Be quiet," Mr. Leroy. said, and the whispering stopped.

But the screaming didn't. In fact, it just got louder, and more numerous. And there were other sounds too- bangs, crashes, and clunks. Something was happening. Something terrible.

Suddenly, they heard someone moaning from outside the door, and a thump as something hit the glass window. Joey saw one of the girls in the class choking back a shriek.

"Shhhh," said Mr. Leroy. quietly. "Don't make a sound."

Whoever it was outside the room tried to open it using the doorknob, but found it locked. Still, they tried for longer than what seemed a normal human would try. Another moan sounded, and another, and another...

Then, there was another sound, running footsteps. From somewhere down the hall, they heard a female voice yelling, "No! Don't do it! Leave them alone!"

And then there was a scream, and a clank as something wooden dropped to the floor. The screams were from a boy, and they were ones of pure agony. Eventually, the screams turned to sickening gurgling noises, and the moaning stopped. Finally, the gurgling stopped as well.

Everyone in the room was terrified. Even Mr. Leroy. seemed as pale as snow. Several people were crying silent tears of fear, and they had their hands over their mouths, as if they were holding back a scream. Joey himself was scared witless. He wasn't one hundred percent sure, but he had a feeling someone had just _died _out there.

His suspicions were confirmed when a puddle of blood began seeping through the crack at the bottom of the door.

Behind him, several of his classmates were struggling not to scream. At the sight of the blood, one of them, a girl, lost control, and screamed. It was short, and she cut herself off as soon as she realized what she was doing, but it was enough. In the light coming through the crack, Joey saw shadows stand up, and move towards the doorway.

Suddenly, a hand burst through the glass window. Several people screamed, and the hand groped around, eventually finding the handle and unlocking the door. It swung open, and several people lumbered in.

Joey recognized some as locals, people he didn't really know but had seen before. Others he didn't recognize. But it didn't matter. Taking one look at them, he knew that they weren't who they were before, and that they never would be again. They walked in a drunken shamble, and the only noises they made were inhuman snarls and moans. Their bodies were covered in bloody wounds and they were walking right towards the group of students huddled in the corner, arms outstretched.

It seemed insane. But judging from the screams, their disfigured faces, and the amount of blood coming from the hallway (and on their mouths), it looked like the truth. They were zombies.

"Run!" Mr. Leroy. yelled.

The scene turned into complete chaos. The students ran for the door, some running around the "zombies," some trying to get a hit on them on the way out. Joey ran around them, and paused at the door, looking back. The zombies had caught some of his classmates, and were feasting on them as they screamed for help.

"Get out!" Mr. Leroy. yelled. "I'll get them!"

He ran back into the classroom, and Joey never saw him again.

Joey left, and paused for a moment, looking at the body in the hallway. He didn't know the boy, but from the looks of it, he was a Junior. He was undeniably dead; he was lying in a pool of blood, and there were several gashes and holes in his body. Many of his insides had been torn out, and were lying on top of or on the ground next to

him.

Joey couldn't take it anymore. He leaned against a wall and vomited.

As he was catching his breath, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He screamed and turned around, bringing up his fist, ready to punch his attacker, but he relaxed when he saw that it was Brian.

"Joey," his friend said. "Are you okay?"

"What the fuck is going on?!" Joey was close to freaking out.

"I don't know, but we need to get out of here!"

The two ran down the hall, towards the gym, which was around the nearest corner. They turned, and almost ran into a group of zombies that were feasting on an unfortunate teacher. The undead looked up, and began shambling towards them.

"Quick! In here!" Brian yelled. He ran towards the door to the boy's locker room and tried to open it, but found that it was locked.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Is anyone in there?"

At first, there was no response. Then, a familiar voice called, "Brian, is that you?"

"Peter!" Brian replied. "Come on dude, let us in!"

There was a clicking noise as the door unlocked, and then it opened. A tall, thin boy about their age with short, light brown hair gestured for the two of them to hurry inside.

They ran in, and the boy shut the door behind them, locking it. Brian and Joey stopped to catch their breath. Now that they were safe, their adrenaline rushes were starting to calm down, and they felt spent.

In the locker room with them were six other people. They recognized four; Peter, the one who had let them in, Rob, Will and his brother Richie. They were friends of Joey and Brian. The other two looked like Sophomores or Juniors, and they didn't recognize them.

"What the fuck is going on?" asked Joey, trying not to have a meltdown.

"We're not really sure," said Will, a boy of about average height with short, slightly curly light brown hair. "The only sign was that right before fifth period, there seemed to be less people here than normal. Then, suddenly, everything went to Hell."

"Pretty much what he said," Peter chipped in.

"Are you two alright?" asked Rob, another boy of about average height, with brown hair that went down to his chin.

"Well, we're unharmed," said Brian. "But I wouldn't say we're okay."

"Who are these two?" asked Joey, gesturing to the other two boys.

"Oh, that's Justin and Frankie," Richie replied. "They're Sophomores."

The two Sophomores didn't say anything. They looked shaken up. Joey thought it was best to leave them alone.

"Those peopleâ€¦ What's wrong with them?" asked Brian.

"Isn't it obvious?" one of the Sophomores finally spoke. He was a tall, thin boy, with short, dark brown hair and green eyes. "They were zombies."

"Frankie, what the hell are you talking about?" asked the other Sophomore, who by process of elimination Joey deduced to be Justin. He was a shorter and slightly chubbier boy, with black hair.

"Come on!" Frankie protested. "Look at them, and tell me without a doubt that those _aren't _zombies! Didn't you see them? They were walking like they they're completely wasted, moaning, and fucking _eating people. _They're zombies, I'm telling you!"

"I think he's right," said Joey.

If anybody disagreed, they kept quiet about it. They kept quiet about everything. For a while, they sat in silence, with the sound of distant screams and zombie moans their only accompaniment.

"Do you think the rest of the town is like this?" asked Brian.

"I don't think it's just Harristown we need to be worried about," Peter replied.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if they really are zombies, this is only the beginning. Unless the military stops it- which, if the movies are telling the truth, they won't," Peter replied.

"Shitâ€¦" said Joey.

"Pretty much."

"So now what?" asked Brian.

"The cops are bound to show up eventually. They won't just leave a school full of kids to die," said Peter. "As long as we keep these doors shut, we're safe until they get here."

"So we're just going to wait?" asked Brian.

"Would you rather go out there and face those things yourself?" asked Will.

Brian thought for a moment, trying to think of something to say in return. But he couldn't.

"Didn't think so," said Will.

And so they waited. The minutes seemed like hours. Joey just wanted to get out of there. He could still hear screams in the distance. And gunshots.

Gunshotsâ€¦|

"Wait a minute," he said.

"What?" asked Brian.

"Do you guys hear that?"

The others strained their ears, and heard the gunshots as well. "Is that them?" asked Justin.

"I think so," said Richie.

"It's at least someone who can help us," Peter added.

The mood was just starting to lighten up, when another sound, a much closer one, started up.

Pounding and screaming, right outside their door.

"Help!" a girl was screaming. "Help me! Let me in, please!"

Justin bolted to his feet. "Sally, is that you?"

"Justin?" the girl yelled.

"Sally!" he yelled, running towards the door. Nobody stopped him. None of them had any idea of the consequences that his actions would bring.

He opened the door, and grabbed Sally's hand. Just as he did so, she was grabbed by two zombies, who dug their teeth into her throat and arm respectively. Blood sprayed, and her screams turned from those of fear into those of agony.

"No!" Justin yelled. He started swinging his fists at the zombies.

"Justin! No! Get back!" yelled Frankie. He started running to pull him back, but stopped when more zombies appeared, attacking Justin.

They could only watch in horror as the zombies began viciously tearing him apart.

"Help!" he choked. Blood was spraying from his wounds at an alarming rate, and it was clear that he was beyond saving.

"Shut the door!" yelled Peter. "It's too late for him!"

Frankie started running forward, but it was too late. More zombies had already seen them, and had come through the door. With horror, Joey realized he recognized one of the zombies. It used to be a boy he had seen around in school. In fact, he had been in school that

day.

The true horror of their situation dawned on him.

“The ones who died— They're already zombies.”

"Oh shit!" Will yelled.

"That way!" yelled Peter. "Out the back door!"

They ran through the locker room, pushed away the board that was holding the door in place, and ran out. Immediately, they turned the corner into the gym, but stopped short.

There were even more zombies in the gym than in the hallway.

"Other way!" yelled Richie.

They turned around and ran up through the hallway, turning the corner towards the back exit.

"Let's get out of here!" yelled Joey.

"Nope! Bad idea!" yelled Peter.

This hallway, including the exit, was filled with zombies as well.

"Motherfuck!" yelled Joey.

"Quick! In the storage closet!" yelled Rob.

Frankie, who had seemed oddly quiet ever since Justin's death, ran over to the door and started trying to push the latch back.

The latch was decades old and thus Frankie was met with a lot of resistance. It opened very slowly, and the time it took to open it was just enough for the zombies to catch up to him.

"Frankie, look out!" Rob yelled.

The door was unlatched, and he opened it. "I got it!" he yelled in triumph.

Those were the last words he would ever say.

The zombies caught up to him, and started biting him. His relieved look turned to one of terror, and then agony. He started screaming and thrashing, but the zombies had him, and were tearing him apart.

"Get in!" Peter yelled. Joey ran into the storage room, trying not to look at the bloody mess that Frankie was turning into.

They all ran into the room and shut the door. Since they were unable to close the latch, they had to stay near the door and hold it shut. But, for the moment, it seemed like they were safe.

"Fuck!" Joey yelled. "They're dead! Oh God, oh God—"

"Calm down, Joey," said Peter. "Freaking out is just going to make this worse."

"How can you say that?" Joey asked accusingly. "How can you ask me to calm down, when three people were just torn apart right in front of us?"

"There's nothing we can do about them. But we're not doing their memories any favors by losing our heads and getting ourselves killed. So just calm down, okay? We're safe here as long as we can keep this door closed."

"And how long until we run out of energy?" asked Joey.

"Well, hopefully it doesn't come to that. We heard gunshots; it could be the police coming to get us."

"How do you know?"

"I don't. But it's the best hope we have right now."

And so, they waited some more. The moans stayed outside, and the zombies kept trying different ways to get in; they tried clawing at the door, for one, but it didn't get them far. Some of them tried turning the knob and pushing it open, but the six teens' combined weight held the door shut. Had the zombies had access to anything other than their basic motor functions- and the need to feed- they would have realized that their combined weight would easily outmatch that of the six teens inside. Luckily for the teens, however, they didn't.

Unfortunately, their strength wasn't limitless. They were putting up a good fight then, but they all knew that it wasn't going to last. They just clung on to the hope that whoever had made the gunshots was coming to help them.

Suddenly, Joey heard them again. Closer this time. Much closer.

In fact, they sounded like they were coming from just down the hall...

"Do you hear that?" asked Will.

"Yeah," said Joey. "I think they're here!"

The shots got closer, and suddenly, the moans started moving away. The shots were now definitely outside their door.

Eventually, the shots ceased, and a man called, "Is anyone in there? It's safe to come out now!"

Cautiously, they opened the door and looked out. Standing outside were two police officers; one man and one woman.

"Are you okay?" asked the woman. She was tall, thin, and pretty, with long, blond hair and blue eyes.

"No," said Brian. "But we're alive."

"Is anyone else?" asked one of the men. He was of average height,

with green eyes and short, black hair.

"We don't know," said Peter. "We had two more, but they were killed."

"I'm sorry," said the officer. He paused for a moment, and then said, "We need to get you out of here."

Nobody had any argument with that. They started to go out through the exit, but ducked back. The back grounds of the school were filled with zombies.

"Where are they all coming from?" asked Will.

"The first of them came out of nowhere. They literally appeared overnight. Nobody knows what happened, but there were a lot of them," said the woman. "They're not alive. I know this sounds crazy, but considering the situation we're in, I think we'll have to accept it."

"They're zombies," said Peter. "We figured."

"Yeah," said the man. "We've estimated that it takes about 10 minutes for someone who's been killed by them to come back as one."

"Is it just Harristown?" asked Brian.

"We don't know," said the woman. "The power's out all over town and all communication is cut off. But I doubt it, to be honest. Someone would have come to help by now if we were."

Nobody said anything. Instead, Rob asked, "So, are we going to get out of here or what?"

"Right," said the man. "Let's get back out front."

They walked down the hallway, turning the corner, and saw that they had a clear shot to the front exit. The problem was; it was very far away. Anything could happen during that walk.

"Can we hurry please?" asked Brian. "I really, REALLY want to leave now."

They walked rapidly down the hallway. After about a minute, they were almost there, and it seemed like they were going to get out. But, suddenly, a zombie turned the corner and started shambling towards them.

"I got him," said the man. He lifted his gun and shot it right in between the eyes.

"Just like in the movies, kids," he said. "You gotta shoot 'em in the head."

That would've been somewhat funny at any other time.

"Ohhhh shit," said Joey.

"What?" asked the man. He followed Joey's gaze, and stopped short. "Fuck," he cursed.

Where the zombie had fallen, several more were taking its place.

"Where are they all coming from?" asked Joey.

"A lot of people died today," said the woman. "Does that answer your question?"

They turned around, ready to circle back and take another exit, but they found themselves blocked by more zombies. Somehow, they had snuck up on them.

"Why does this always happen?" Joey seethed.

The police officers began shooting at the zombies in front of them, but it was no use. There were too many of them.

"In here!" said Peter. He opened the door to a classroom, which Joey recognized as one that had another entrance into the hallway beyond the zombies.

Joey, Brian, Rob, Richie and Will all ran in. The woman followed them, keeping watch for more zombies, while the man held the ones in the hallway off until they knew the room beyond was safe. And Peterâ€

Peter was just standing there in the hallway, thinking. Joey turned around, and watched, frightened at what his friend might do.

"Peter!" he yelled. "What are you doing?"

Peter didn't respond. Instead, he kept thinking, before finally coming to a decision. In one move, he struck out at the police officer. Caught off guard, he dropped his gun, and Peter picked it up. Then, with a smooth motion, he pushed the officer into the room and slammed the door, pressing his weight against it so that nobody could come out.

"What the fuck are you doing, Peter?" Joey yelled.

"They're still coming!" Peter said through the door. "That means there's some on the other side! The only way for us to sneak by is to create a distraction. And that's what I'm doing."

The woman ran ahead, and saw that the other exit was being blocked by zombies. "He's right!" she called.

"You don't have to do this, kid," said the man.

"Peter, I'm not leaving you here!" yelled Joey.

"I'm sorry, Joey," said Peter. "Don't leave until the coast is clear."

He turned around and began shooting, still leaning against the door.

"No!" Joey screamed. He ran up to the door, trying to open it, but

Peter held it closed.

The man grabbed him and pulled him back. "He's made his decision!" he snapped. "Don't let yourself get killed too."

"No! Let me go!" he sobbed. But it was no use.

The officer dragged him to the other exit and crouched, waiting for the coast to be clear. Behind them, the gunshots kept going. After a while, however, they stopped. There was one more sound; a yell. And then there was silence.

Joey looked around, and saw that tears were slipping down everyone's face. He sniffed and blinked to hold back his own; the time for crying would come later. Now, they had to survive.

Finally, the coast was clear, and they opened the door and ran down the hallway towards the exit.

They made it this time. When they finally burst out of the doors and into the fresh air, what should have been a happy occasion was instead a sad one. They had made it out, but Peter hadn't.

"He's dead, isn't he?" asked Joey.

The police woman put her hand on his shoulder in comfort. "I'm sorry," she said.

"You five need to get somewhere safe," said the officer. "Hole up in a house somewhere, and board the windows. Don't make any loud noises, and don't draw blood. Those things seem to attract them."

They continued walking, and were approaching a police cruiser. "Open the trunk," said the woman.

The man went to the front and pressed the button to open the trunk. Inside were several pistols. "We're supplying as many people with these as we can," said the woman. "It's dangerous out there. Zombies aren't the only problem. We'd escort you somewhere, but there might still be people in the school. And your friend— We never confirmed his death. It's an off chance, but we might be able to find him. Alive."

"In case we do, where should we tell him you are?" asked the man.

Everyone thought for a moment. Finally, Brian asked, "How about my house?"

"I don't see why not," said Joey.

Nobody had any arguments.

"Okay, so they'll be at your house," said the man. "What's your name?"

"Brian."

"Okay."

"Anyway, we want you to take these," she held out three guns. Richie, Joey, and Will stepped up to take them.

"Be careful out there. There are some very trigger happy maniacs running around," said the man.

"Goodbye, and good luck," said the woman.

"Bye," said Brian. "Andâ€¦| thank you."

"You're welcome," said the man. The two of them ran back into the school.

The five of them stood there for a moment. Joey tried to push his mind off of Peter, and instead focused on the gun in his hand. He had never shot one before, and hoped he would be able to when the time came.

"We should go," said Will.

They all agreed. When they tried to find their cars, however, they were out of luck. Almost every car in the parking lot had been jacked, and theirs were no exceptions. They had to walk.

For safety, they decided to cut through the woods. There would be less danger in there, and more places for them to hide.

When the time finally came for them to cross a road, they stopped. Before emerging from the woods, they looked up and down the street, searching for signs of danger.

They didn't see any zombies, but they did see another survivor. He was far off, but he seemed to be a man carrying a large gun, and he was moving towards them.

They could tell he wasn't a zombie because of the way he walked. Zombies walked in a drunken shamble, and while they could go as fast as an average speed walk (which was faster than what this man was going), they did it very awkwardly. This man was walking smoothly and deliberately.

"Hey!" Joey yelled. They started running towards him.

The man stopped and readied his gun. They slowed down, but then figured that it was only a nervous reflex; the man simply wasn't sure if they were a threat or not.

As they got closer, however, they realized something was wrong. They were running faster than the zombies, and the man must've realized that they were alive when they had yelled. It was clear that they were humans.

So why was he still aiming at them?

When they were about twenty feet away, he yelled, "Don't come any closer!"

They all stopped, realizing that they had put themselves in danger. The man in front of them was tall and tough-looking, with long black hair, a thick mustache, and green eyes. He was pointing a

double-barreled shotgun right at them.

"Don't take another step, or I'll blow your heads off," he said. They could practically hear the madness in his voice.

"Calm down, dude," said Brian. "We're friends."

"No," he said, his voice rising to a hysterical screech. "You're going to eat me! You all want to eat me!"

"No, we're not one of them--"

"I don't give a shit!" he interrupted. "Just stay away from me!"

"Okay, we'll just leave you alone then," said Brian, slowly stepping backwards.

But Richie had had enough. "Now, look here," he said, taking a step forward. "Who do you think you ar--"

A deafening bang rang through the air, and Richie stopped in his tracks. There was another, and he was sent flying backwards, blood trailing through the air behind him.

He landed in a heap a few feet behind them, blood pouring from his chest.

"No!" Will yelled. "Richie!" he ran over and knelt down over his twin.

Joey stared at Richie's dead body in shock. Then, his gaze shifted back to the man, who was reloading his smoking shotgun.

"You little bastard," he said softly, his voice dripping with anger and sorrow. With one movement, he flipped off the safety on his pistol, cocked it, lifted it up, and shot.

A hole appeared in the man's chest, and a spurt of blood came from it. He had a shocked look on his face, as his shotgun fell to the ground, and his eyes and hands went to his wound.

In the heat of his rage, Joey walked over to him, pressed his gun against the man's temple, and pulled the trigger again. Blood and brains sprayed out the side of his head, and he crumpled to the ground.

Joey stared at the man's freshly bleeding corpse in horror. His rage began to fade, and it was replaced with shock and guilt. "I just killed someone," he thought.

They all stood there in shock, nobody making a sound. One by one, tears began streaming from their eyes, as the truth hit them.

Richie was dead.

****Present Day****

"Are you okay?"

The sound of Ben's voice cut through Joey's stream of memories, and he snapped back to reality.

"Yeah, it's justâ€¦" he broke off, trying to think of words to describe what he was feeling. "A lot of bad things happened here."

"I know," said Ben. "I was here too. I saw things I wish I hadn't seen. But there's nothing we can do about that now. The best thing we can do is stop ourselves from dying."

"We're the only ones left now, aren't we?"

Ben was silent for a moment, thinking of what to say. "Yeah," he eventually replied. "I guess we are."

They kept walking, passing the gym and the cafeteria. They passed the spot where Peter had sacrificed himself, and Joey stopped for a moment.

"What?" Ben asked.

"This is where we lost Peter."

"Oh," said Ben. "I'm sorry. He was a good guy."

"Yeah."

Suddenly, Ben tilted his head, listening. "What theâ€¦?" he trailed off.

"What's wrong?" asked Joey.

"Be quiet," he whispered urgently. He turned and sneaked down the hallway. His hand went to his belt, and he pulled out a large, razor sharp Bowie knife that he kept hidden in his pant leg.

"Holy shit," said Joey.

Ben jerked his head back, frowning, and gesturing for Joey to be quiet.

"Sorry," Joey whispered.

Ben gave him an impolite hand gesture, and continued.

When he finally reached the corner, he looked around it, and immediately turned back. He gestured for Joey to come over.

Slowly and quietly, Joey walked over to him. "What is it?" he whispered.

"Zombies," he said. "Two of them down the hallway. We're going to sneak until they see us, and then we'll take them out."

"Okay," said Joey. He brandished his pistol.

"No!" Ben snapped, a little too loudly. Nervously, he looked back around, but the zombies hadn't noticed.

"Don't use your gun," he whispered. "That horde outside will be on us in no time. Take this."

He handed Joey a switchblade.

"Okay," Joey replied. He took the switchblade and holstered his pistol.

"Let's go."

They snuck around the corner and down the hallway. It was very dark, since there was no electricity (although where the zombies were, the hallway widened and a wall-length window let light from one of the school's courtyards through, illuminating the hallway just before it ended), and they were very quiet, so the zombies didn't notice them until it was too late. They were each on separate sides of the hallway, pressing against the green lockers. Whenever there was a gap in the lockers where the doors to the classrooms were, they stopped for a moment, hiding, until Ben gave the signal to continue.

They were ten feet away from the zombies, right where the hallway began widening, when one of them noticed and started towards them. It let out a raspy, inhuman snarl, alerting the other one, which began shambling towards them as well.

"Go," said Ben. He ran forward, wielding the knife in his right hand, and brought it down on the zombie. It connected with its face, the tip piercing the flesh of its eye, before driving all the way in with a large spurt of blood. The knife sliced through the brain, killing the zombie.

As Ben pulled the knife out, Joey pressed the button on his switchblade, and the blade flicked out. He ran over to the zombie, and stabbed it square in the forehead. The entry was rough but the zombie's skull was rotted, and the blow had enough strength behind it to get to the brain. The zombie died instantly.

Wincing, Joey pulled out the knife, and looked away from the bleeding wound as he cleaned the blade. "That was gross," he said. "Please don't make me do that again."

"We may have to," Ben replied. "We need to conserve ammo as long as possible."

"Shit."

"Let's check these rooms," said Ben. "I say we start with the front office. Get the worst part out of the way first."

The door to the front office was in full view of the zombies. Right next to it, at a right angle, were the front doors of the school, and they were almost entirely covered in windows. They would have to be extremely careful.

They snuck over there, and stopped right as they were about to turn the corner into the new hallway that the entrance was in. Looking around the corner, they saw that there were just as many zombies as before.

Let's go, Ben mouthed.

They snuck around, hearts pounding in suspense. With every waking moment, Joey was sure that they would see them. It was only a matter of time.

But they made it. But the door was locked.

"Let's go around," Joey whispered.

"No, I might be able to get this," Ben replied. He stuck his Bowie knife behind the doorknob, and started trying to pry it off.

It seemed to take hours, but in reality, it only took minutes. However, every one of those minutes seemed to stretch on forever. Joey's heart pounded, and he seemed frozen. He didn't want to think about the fact that they were standing in full view of a gigantic zombie horde. Instead, he focused all of his attention on the doorknob, willing it to break open.

In their distraction, both of them had neglected to watch for any zombies that might be sneaking up on them. Had they been doing so, they would have seen the threat approaching from behind before it was too late.

One second, everything was going fine. The next, everything went to hell.

There was a clinging noise as the doorknob came free, and Ben caught it as it fell. The zombie struck as he was raising his left fist in triumph. It grabbed through the glass at them, shattering it in what seemed in the silence to be a deafening noise. Snarling, it grabbed Ben's arm and pulled him through. Ben yelled, startled, creating even more noise.

To make matters worse, Ben's arm began pressing against the sharp, jagged glass as he was yanked through it. It dug into the soft flesh beneath his wrist, caught, and sliced. Blood spurted from the huge gash in his arm.

Joey could only stand there, freezing in fear. There was no way the zombies outside hadn't heard this. No way.

As Ben struggled to keep his arm away from the zombie's outstretched teeth, he yelled, "Shoot the fucking thing!"

"What about the horde?" Joey yelled.

"Fuck the horde!" Ben was practically screaming at this point. "If they don't already know we're here, they're deaf!"

Joey pulled out his gun and aimed, waiting for a clear shot.

"Just shoot already!"

He pulled the trigger, and the zombie went down. Ben fell with it. Joey opened the door, rushed through it, and went to his fallen friend.

"Are you okay?" he asked, worried.

Ben grimaced in pain. "No," he said. "My arm's bleeding like crazy, but you didn't shoot me, and I wasn't bit."

Joey looked, and he was right. His arm was covered in blood, as well as a lot of his clothes and the ground. He was losing more.

"We need to patch that up," said Joey.

"Not now." Ben pointed behind him.

Joey looked up, and saw a horrifying sight.

Every single zombie in the horde was staring straight at them.

Fighting back panic, he said, "Okay. Put pressure on it, and let's get back to the room as quickly as we can, so we can wrap that up before they reach us. Then, we can hide it out, or, if they find us— Well, it's fortified."

"Yeah," said Ben. "And we can retreat into the courtyard." He put pressure on his wound, slowing the bleeding, and stood up. "Let's go," he said. "They're moving."

He was right. The zombies were shambling towards them, and they were close.

They ran back to the room. Ben was trailing blood behind him, but he still had enough to make it there. Assuming, that is, the bleeding could be stopped soon.

When they got back, they hastily removed the fortifications and set them back up inside, making sure that nobody could get in without some effort. Checking on Brian, they found that he was in an even worse condition than before, but still alive.

"Okay," said Joey. He rummaged through his backpack and took out his spare shirt. Ripping it into shreds, he began tying it around Ben's arm, cutting off as much circulation as he could.

He wrapped another layer of shirt around the wound, and a third just to be safe. He didn't want any blood soaking through. The tightness had stopped most of it, but there was still a miniscule trickle that might build up over a long period of time.

"Now we wait," said Ben.

After a minute or two, they heard footsteps, and eventually moans coming from outside their door. They waited, hoping and praying that the zombies would pass.

They didn't.

There was a shudder against the fortifications, and they jumped, startled.

"Shit!" Joey cursed.

"They're coming," said Ben. "The door will slow them down, but they'll get through eventually. Nothing stops a horde that big."

"So what do we do?"

"Wait for an opening, and then hold them off for as long as we can. Meanwhile, we should get Brian into that courtyard. Save us the trouble of doing it in the middle of a zombie attack."

Joey pulled out his gun and shot one of the windows in the back of the room. The glass shattered, and they were left with a large opening, big enough for all three of them to get through at once. Carefully, they lifted Brian, carried him over to the window, and placed him on the ground on the other side.

"Okay, glad we got that out of the way," said Ben.

For minutes, they sat there waiting. The barricaded door held the zombies for longer than Joey thought it would, but eventually, it broke. Wood from the door splintered inward, as filthy zombie hands reached through. They grasped out at nothing as they tried to get the humans inside. More holes appeared, and the fortifications were damaged further.

"Okay, time to start zombie killing," said Ben. "Knives first."

"Oh, not again."

They ran over to the door, knives drawn, and started stabbing at zombies through the newly made holes. They were careful not to be bitten or scratched, and they always struck the head. Zombies fell, but more always came to take their place.

The door, the floor, and their bodies were now soaked in blood. But the zombies still kept coming. There seemed to be even more than before, and the damage to the door was just getting worse. Ben couldn't help but think back to the day he had met up with Matt again. This zombie horde felt eerily similar to the one they had faced that day.

Eventually, the zombies broke through all of the fortifications and stumbled into the room.

"Now what?" asked Joey.

"Keep stabbing. Don't retreat until I say so."

"Who made you the boss, anyway?"

"I did. Now shut up and stab zombies."

They continued to stab undead while they backed up to the window. When they couldn't back up any more, they jumped out, leaving a bloody mess and a bunch of hungry zombies behind.

"I'll take Brian; you stab."

"Why can't we just use our guns?" Joey complained.

"If you haven't noticed, we're running low on ammo. And we need to conserve it as much as possible."

"Butâ€¦ Oh fine," Joey gave in. "But what about our stuff?"

"We'll get it later. If there is a later. Right now, we need to run."

The zombies were starting to climb out of the window behind them. With some effort, Ben managed to lift Brian, and they ran across the courtyard. Joey stabbed a few more zombies in the head, then followed.

"Break a window!" Ben yelled. "Hurry!"

Joey picked up a large stone and threw it through a window on the opposite side, shattering it. Ben climbed through it into a classroom, bringing Brian with him. Joey was right behind.

"Let's get out of here," said Joey.

"Way ahead of you."

They opened the door and ran out of the room, turning to the right and running down the hall. They were just around the corner from one of the school's back entrances, and there were no zombies in this hallway.

They reached the corner and turned, only to discover with dismay that the exit was blocked. There was a huge zombie horde in front of this one as well. To make things worse, the zombies had spotted them, and were now breaking their way through the doors.

"Other exit!" yelled Joey. They turned and ran the way they had just come. At the other end of this hallway was another exit. Joey hoped there wouldn't be any zombies at this one.

"Look out!" Ben yelled. Joey looked ahead and saw some zombies stumbling out of the room they had just been in, blocking the hallway. Joey lifted his pistol and shot them in the head. One by one they fell.

They cleared the area just as more were walking out. They had no choice but to keep going now.

They reached the end of the hallway and turned, only to find that this exit was blocked as well. More zombies were there, and more began breaking their way through.

"Where the hell are they all coming from?!" Ben yelled in frustration.

"Let's try the PAC entrance," Joey suggested.

"Are you insane?! That hallway is _filled _with zombies! We'll be torn apart in seconds!"

"Not if we cut through the classrooms."

They looked at each other, than ran to the classroom on the left three doors down. This time, they made sure to shut the door behind them so that no zombies could get them quickly.

The classrooms were all connected via doorways, and halfway down the hallway there was a door that led out to the side of the school, onto a sidewalk that led to the Performing Arts Center (PAC for short) and the middle school. The last classroom before it had a doorway that led straight to it.

Joey opened the door in this classroom and ran through it, with Ben straight behind him. Looking back, he noticed that Ben was slowing down. _He's running out of steam, _he thought. _This isn't goodâ€¦|_

They were almost there; they just had to keep pushing. They ran through classroom after classroom, until they finally reached the exit.

This one was unblocked. Joey pushed open the door and ran out, enjoying the feel of the sun on his skin. "Thank God!" he exclaimed. "I can't believe we- oh shit, not again."

The entire yard between the two schools was filled with scattered groups of zombies. And now even these had noticed them. Even the area to their right, which led to the front of the school, had zombies in it.

Joey looked ahead, and saw that the only safe place to go was the PAC. So, he started running there. He reached the back entrance, opened it, and held it for Ben to go through.

"Come on," he said. "We should be safe in the auditorium. Plenty of exits and places to hide."

"Sounds good," said Ben.

They ran through the entrance hall of the PAC to the big, wooden double doors marked "Auditorium." Joey pulled them open and ran through both them and the second set of doors behind them.

The auditorium was pitch black, but he knew from experience how big it was. In front of them, rows of seats stretched back to the big, black stage. To either side, the seats stretched back, one in a ramp, and another into a circular, chamber-esque area that rotated back into another room.

"Let's get to the stage," Joey suggested.

They walked through the darkness, being careful not to trip over anything, and found the walkway between the seats. As they made their way up, they felt in front of them for the stage. When they finally found it, Ben placed Brian on top of it, and he and Joey heaved themselves up.

They sat on the edge of the stage, waiting. Neither of them really knew whether or not the zombies would find them, but they didn't think they were free yet. Most likely, the zombies would follow them, but they could flee backstage and slip out through the other rear exit, and either escape then, or flee through the middle school.

This was the plan that was forming in Joey's head. He explained it to Ben, and Ben agreed that it would be a good idea. Right as they were

finished discussing that, however, the door opened, casting a beam of light into the room and the zombies began stumbling in.

"Time to go," said Joey.

"Why, why, why?" Ben asked. "Why is this happening?" He stood and picked up Brian again.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small flashlight. He turned it on, and they began heading backstage.

"How many different things are you carrying right now?" Joey asked.

"You'd be surprised," Ben replied.

As soon as they reached backstage, they ran into an unpleasant surprise. The backstage was filled with zombies, and it looked like they were coming from outside.

"Shit!" Ben yelled. "Fuck this!"

They ran back to the stage, and saw that the zombies were almost there.

"There are so many of them!" said Joey in terror. With a quick scan around the room, they realized that all of the exits were blocked off. They were trapped.

"This is it," said Ben, setting Brian down on the ground. "This is where we make our last stand. Don't hold back."

They both pulled out their automatic weapons and opened fire. Zombies dropped left and right, but they were still advancing on them.

"Look out!" Ben yelled. Zombies were starting to come from backstage. Joey turned and shot at them, killing some. "I'll cover backstage!" he yelled.

They shot, and zombies fell, but they kept coming. For every one that dropped, what felt like 30 more rose to take its place. And they were getting very close, very fast. Ben's flashlight could only help so much.

Eventually, Joey ran out of ammo on his automatic, so He switched to the gun he had taken from the dead man earlier; a shotgun. He ran out of what little ammunition he had found, and switched to his pistol. From the sounds he heard, he guessed that the same thing was happening to Ben. .

They continued shooting, but Joey was beginning to realize that there wasn't much hope. Zombies kept dying, but there was still no end in sight.

Finally, after another few minutes of shooting, Joey ran out of ammo.

His pistol was his last gun. All he had left now was his knife. While that would get him a few kills, the most he would be doing would be prolonging his death.

Behind him, Ben shot the last rounds of his shotgun, and threw it aside. He pulled out his Magnum, and, realizing he now had to cover all sides, cursed loudly.

Joey stood behind him, praying.

After a few more minutes, Ben's ammo ran out too.

"Wellâ€¦" said Ben. "That's it."

"We tried," said Joey.

"We did," Ben acknowledged. "This is the end, my friend. What do you say we give them Hell on the way out?" At that, he drew his Bowie knife.

Joey flicked out the switchblade. "Let's go," he said.

They stood there, back to back, knives raised, waiting for the end. Joey felt mixed feelings; remorse, regret that they had been unable to save Brian, and- in the end- acceptance.

He looked down at Brian. "Lucky bastard," he commented.

"How so?" asked Ben.

"He's not going to feel a thing."

Ben chuckled a little bit at this. He was about to reply, when the room was illuminated by a ball of light. Joey only saw it for a split second, but in that second he noticed that it was moving rapidly towards them.

The ball exploded. There was a deafening roar, and Joey was flung across the stage. He smashed into the wall, and everything went black.

* * *

><p>You guys are probably ready to kill me for all of these cliffhangers. Anyway, stayed tuned for Sunday, for the exciting conclusion!

In the meantime, let me know what you think.

16. Chapter Fifteen: Rescue

So this is a bit of a short one, I know. Still, we finally get to see the conclusion of the current subplot! I hope you guys enjoy it!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifteen:

Rescue

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

****Time since infection: Unknown****

"Oh shit."

Trent's startled voice cut through Matt's daze. He had been spacing out, trying to forget all that was going on, and attempting to find peace in flight, at least for a little bit.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Look down."

Matt looked down, and realized two things. One, that they were back at the school and two, the parking lot was filled with zombies.

"Shade, get us down there," Matt requested. "Now!"

Shade nodded, and then landed in the parking lot in an area free of zombies. Matt and Trent slid off of his back, and the three of them began running towards the front door of the school.

"Please let them be alive," Matt muttered.

If Trent heard him, he didn't say anything. They ran to the 600 hallway and were greeted with the sight of a large group of zombies clustered in front of their room.

"Shoot 'em," said Trent.

They drew their weapons and began firing, all while running forward. By the time they reached the door, only two were left standing. Trent bashed one of them in the skull with the butt of his gun, and its skull caved in, killing it instantly. Matt shot the other one in the head.

They looked in the room, hoping to find Ben, Joey and Brian, but found nothing but their bags, a broken window that led into the courtyard, and zombie corpses.

"We're too late," said Matt.

"Maybe not," said Trent. "They might still be around somewhere."

"How do you know?"

"These corpses are fresh."

"No shit," Matt retorted. "We just shot them!"

"What about the ones in there?" Trent pointed into the room. "We didn't shoot those ones."

Matt thought for a moment. "Yeahâ€¦" he said. "You're right."

"You saw all the zombies in the Performing Arts Center, right?"

"You think they're in there?"

"It's our best bet." Trent walked in and observed the broken window. "Look, the window out to the courtyard is broken. So is the one on the other side. They must have retreated through the courtyard, and then attempted to go out the back. But they were probably blocked off by more zombies, so they went to the PAC."

"That makes sense," said Matt. "But there's one other thing that's missing."

"What?"

"Brian."

"I'd say that's obvious, wouldn't you?" Trent turned to face him. "Either he was still alive and they brought him with them, or we're too late."

Matt didn't want to think about that. "Let's hope it's the first one," he said. "And if it's not? Let's see if we can't save Ben and Joey at least."

They ran back out into the hallway they had come from. When they reached the door that led out the side of the building, they exited the school and ran down the sidewalk to the back entrance of the PAC. There were several zombies making their way through the entrance, so Shade shot a ball of fire at them, knocking them backwards and killing them.

"Come on, let's go!" yelled Matt.

They ran through the door and into the entrance hall. There were very few zombies in here; most of them were coming through the front entrance or at the door to the auditorium. There were loud noises coming from inside.

Gun shots. Matt recognized them from being a Magnum.

"Let's sneak up on them from behind," Trent suggested.

"Good idea," Matt whispered.

They holstered their guns and drew their knives, then snuck up behind the zombies, stabbing them quickly before they knew what was happening. Before long, the doorway was clear.

Matt burst through the two sets of doors, just as the magnum stopped firing. "Please," he muttered. "Come on, come on!"

They emerged into a dark auditorium, filled with the sound of zombie moans. Matt instantly saw a flashlight beam onstage, illuminating several zombies in its wake, and then finally, a face.

Joey.

"Come on Shade," said Matt. "Let's give them some light."

Shade smirked, and then let loose a ball of fire.

It flew across the room and exploded. The flashlight beam was knocked back, but the explosion illuminated the room enough for Matt to see that neither of their friends had been hit dead-on. The zombies, however, weren't so lucky.

"One more, Shade."

Shade shot again, and the fire on the stage grew bigger. They could see most of the zombies now.

Matt readied his AK and fired, shooting all the zombies he could see. Trent followed suit, and they slowly made their way up the aisle.

Finally, the room was clear.

"Ben!" Matt yelled. "Joey!" The three of them ran up to the stage and jumped onto it.

Matt spotted Joey's body lying against the wall to the side. He ran over to him, just as he opened his eyes.

"Joey," Matt called. "Are you okay?"

"Matt?" Joey asked, weakly. "You're alive?"

"Yeah, we're back. We have the cure, if there's still time."

"What happened?"

"Shade blew up the stage."

"How long have I been out?"

"Only a couple of minutes. Need a hand?" Matt held his hand out to Joey. He grabbed it, and Matt helped him up. "Thanks," he said. "Where are the others?"

Matt looked around. Trent was on the other side of the stage, helping up Ben, and Shade was sniffing what appeared to be a corpse lying in the middle of the stage.

Or at least that's what Matt thought at first. Then, he realized that the dragon was taking more interest in this body than he would that of a normal zombie.

"Wait a minute—" he muttered to himself.

"What?" asked Joey.

Without answering either of Joey's questions, Matt walked over to Shade. The Night Fury looked up at him and whimpered, then looked back down at the body.

It was Brian. And he looked bad.

"Jesus," Matt breathed. He knelt down over him and felt his neck. He had a pulse. Matt breathed a sigh of relief.

"How long has it been?" he asked.

"About twenty hours," said Ben, out of breath. "Why? And, more importantly, what took you so long?" He saw the portal gun, which was still on Shade's shoulder. "â€|The fuck is that?"

"It's a long story," Matt replied. "What matters now is that it isn't too late. Trent, give me the cure."

"You got it?" Joey asked in excitement.

"Yep," said Trent, grinning. "Looks like we may have won this battle after all, huh?"

Matt grinned, and Trent walked over to him, producing one of the syringes. "I'll do it," the man said. He prepared it for injection, and then bent over Brian, searching for a vein. He eventually found one in his shoulder, and stuck the needle in. "Now let's hope this works," he said. "Remember, it's not a one hundred percent chance."

"Oh, that's just perfect," said Joey sarcastically.

Trent injected the cure, and then tossed the needle across the room. "Touching that would be a bad idea," he said. "Just saying."

"No arguments there," Matt replied.

Suddenly, Shade's ears pricked up, and his head flicked across the room, towards the door. It was hard to see by the light from the fire, but Matt thought he saw the dragon sniff a few times.

Then, his head whipped towards backstage, and he did the same thing.

Matt walked over to him. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Shade started growling.

"Guysâ€|" said Joey.

"What?" asked Ben. Then, "Oh shit!"

Matt looked at him, and followed his gaze to the auditorium door. "Oh noâ€|" he breathed.

Coming in from the door were even more zombies.

"Fuck, fuckity fuck, fuckfuckfuckfuck!" Ben yelled. "Fuck!"

"Shit!" yelled Joey. "They're coming from backstage again!"

"Why can't these asshole zombies all just get fucked!?" Ben complained.

"We're out of ammo," said Joey. "You have any left?"

"Yep," said Trent. "And Shade here has something better than bullets, if you know what I mean."

Shade nodded and smirked, readying himself to fight.

"You know," Ben began, "You never realize just what you have until you lose it. And then get it back again. In this case, one badass pyromaniac dragon. Hell yeah!"

"I'd say talking time is over, and shooting time has started," said Trent.

"Right," said Matt. "We'll take backstage and Shade will handle the front entrance. Until he runs out of shots, that is." He turned to Shade. "That alright?"

Shade nodded and turned towards the front entrance.

Matt and Trent raised their automatics and aimed towards the zombies coming from backstage. "Ready?" Trent asked.

"Yep."

Shade growled at the zombies, signaling that he was ready.

"Go!"

Matt and Trent began firing at the zombies, who by this time had reached the fire. They fell like dominos, but there were still a lot more.

Matt thought back to Lawrence, and what had happened there. Like Ben, this reminded him eerily of that day. Little did he know, Trent and Shade were feeling the same.

Beside them, Shade shot a ball of fire towards the door. The resulting explosion killed almost all of the zombies that had already gotten in, and cracked the doorframe.

Matt and Trent kept shooting, while Shade shot another fireball. More zombies died, and the frame cracked even more.

He waited for more zombies to come in, while Matt and Trent continued shooting. Somehow they were still coming.

When he decided that enough zombies had come in, he used his last shot. The zombies died, but more kept coming. Making a snap decision, he took off, flying over and slashing at them with his claws, then pulling up sharply.

"What is he doing?" asked Joey.

"Killing them!" Matt replied. "He's out of shots!"

"Oh," said Joey. "Thank you, Shade!"

"Go Shade!" Ben yelled.

He kept shooting, but the zombies kept coming. Eventually, his gun was emptied, and he went to reload, but realized he was out of ammo. He switched to his pistol and fired at more zombies. Behind him, Trent did the same.

"You know, you two could actually help," Matt suggested.

"Nah, I'm good," said Ben.

"We don't even have guns," said Joey.

Matt turned around, pulled out his magnum, and held it out. "You do now."

Joey turned to Ben and gestured for him to take the gun.

"What are you looking at me for?" asked Ben. "He's handing it to you."

Joey gave him the finger and took the gun. Holding it in two hands, he began shooting.

"You two keep covering backstage," said Matt. "I'll help Shade." He turned and saw the dragon slice a zombie's head clean open with his claws. "Yeah!" he yelled, before opening fire.

His excitement was short-lived, as he realized that he was on his last clip.

"Shit," he muttered under his breath. He loaded the clip and shot six zombies in the head, killing them, before he was out. "You're on your own, buddy!" he yelled. "Sorry!"

He turned to the others. "I'm out of ammo," he said.

"Then we're screwed," said Joey.

"Why?"

"We're almost out too. And Shade can't keep that up forever."

"Damn," he cursed.

Eventually, Trent and Joey ran out of ammo themselves.

"Everybody have knives?" Ben asked, drawing his bowie knife.

"Yep," said Trent, drawing his.

"One switchblade, coming right up," said Joey, drawing his switchblade.

Matt drew his, a switchblade like Joey's, and braced himself. "Shade!" he yelled. "We need you over here!"

Shade finished crushing a zombie's head and flew over to them. He landed in the center, and braced himself for a last stand.

"Well," said Joey. "If it helps, I'd say the odds are more in our favor than they were the last time we were in this situation."

"No shit, dude," said Ben. "We've got a dragon on our side. A black one, too."

"And this time we can actually see," Trent added.

They all braced themselves for the fight. The zombies slowly but steadily made their way towards them. Finally, the ones coming from backstage reached them, and the fight began.

Matt slashed and stabbed, dropping zombies left and right. He made sure to always fall back whenever he had killed one, so that he wouldn't get bit. Beside him, all the others were doing the same. Shade was doing especially well.

One unfortunate zombie made the mistake of stepping too close to the fire, and Matt pushed him in. As it writhed, Matt dragged a couple more in, and then kept stabbing.

"Thanks for making that," he said to Shade.

Shade grunted, and then went back to fighting.

For a moment, it seemed that they had a chance. But then, the other zombie group caught up to them.

There were two sets of stairs leading up to the stage, and the zombies had walked up both of them. They were quickly being pinned against the wall, and if the battle didn't turn again in their favor soon, they would be devoured.

Unlessâ€¦|

"Shade!" Matt yelled. "Can you get us up toâ€¦| What? How?"

The stairs on the right side of the front entrance led up to a door that led back into the entrance hall. If Shade could fly them up, they would have a chance at escaping. But, as soon as Matt was about to propose his plan, zombies began emerging from it.

"Oh come on!" Ben yelled. "Zombies ain't that smart! What the fuck is going on?!"

"We're done for," said Joey. "It was nice knowing you guys."

"I'll see you all in Hell," said Ben.

"Dude, if you're going to Hell, you're going alone," Trent replied.

"You're just jealous that I'm going to a deeper circle."

Matt retreated to Shade's side. "Looks like we're here again," he said. "Feels familiar, doesn't it?"

He was referring to Lawrence, of course. Shade nodded, and looked him in the eye.

"We wouldn't have made it this far without you," said Matt. "So, before we die, I just wanted to sayâ€¦| thank you."

Shade was about to acknowledge his thanks, when a loud voice filled the room.

"YO! FUCKNUTS!"

At that, a loud whirring noise came from the door, and bullets sprayed everywhere. Zombies fell left and right, and the air was filled with blood.

"Get down!" Trent yelled.

They ducked to the ground, as bullets ripped through the zombies in front of them, tearing them apart. Blood splattered all over them, but they didn't care. Someone was rescuing them.

When the gunfire stopped, and the last zombie had died, they hesitantly stood up. The light from the fire flickered, and from it they could see the mess the stage had become. Blood and bodies were lying everywhere, and over by the door, they saw a shadowy figure holding a large, box-like thing.

"Well, well, well," said the figure. "Looks like I really saved your asses, didn't I?"

"Who are you?" asked Trent.

* * *

><p>So, now that you guys are probably going to kill me over yet another cliffhanger, I'll be leaving now. See you back here next Sunday!

Let me know what you think about the story so far!

17. Chapter Sixteen: The Man in Black

Alright, just as promised; the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.

* * *

><p>Chapter Sixteen:

The Man in Black

Harristown, New Hampshire

_"__Who are you?"_

The sound of the man's laughter filled the room. He moved forward a few steps, and was illuminated by the fire.

He was a tall, Caucasian man in his mid-twenties. He wore a grey hoodie, which was unzipped, and a white, sleeveless T-Shirt beneath it. He was wearing blue jeans and a pair of filthy black sneakers. His hair was cut neatly short, so that it was only about a centimeter long, and his chin was covered in bristle that showed off his infrequent shaving habits. In one hand, he was holding a lit cigarette, and in the other, he was gripping a minigun, which attached to the large backpack he was carrying.

"The question is," he said in a southern drawl, smirking. "Who are you?"

He took a puff of his cigarette and walked down the aisle and climbed onto the stage, dropping his bag and gun behind him. Approaching Trent, who was the closest to him, he reached out his hand.

"Name's Lucas," he said. "Lucas Shepard."

Trent stepped forward and took his hand. "Thank you, Lucas," he said. "We'd be dead if it wasn't for you."

"That you would," said Lucas, breaking the hand shake. "But don't mention it. Anything to keep those fuckers from taking more of us." He took another whiff of his cigarette. "Well, I've answered your question, now you answer mine. Who are you?"

"I'm Trent," Trent replied.

"Wait," said Lucas, holding out his hand and squinting in thought. "Wait a minuteâ€¦" He appeared to be thinking hard for a moment. "I swear, I've seen your face before," he muttered. Then, it dawned on him.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "You're that punk rocker, from that bandâ€¦ What was itâ€¦ Still We're somethingâ€¦"

"Still We're Forgotten," Trent finished.

"Yeah!" he said, pointing at him. "Still We're Forgotten! You're the lead singer!" He laughed. "Well ain't that something. I had some friends who listened to your stuff." He paused to take another whiff of his cigarette. "If only they were still with usâ€¦" He shook his head. "But there's nothing we can do about that now." Changing the subject, he asked, "Who're your friends?"

"Forget us," said Ben. "I want to meet your friend." He pointed to the minigun on the floor.

Lucas laughed. "I like you, kid," he said.

Ben gave him a thumbs up.

"Well, you've already met Ben," said Trent. "That kid there is Joey," he pointed to Joey. "The kid passed out on the floor is Brian, and that one's Matt. Oh, and that beast lurking in the corner next to him is Shade.

"He's the demolitions expert," Ben added.

Until now, Lucas hadn't noticed Shade. The dragon had been lurking just outside the light of the fire, and had been practically invisible to anyone who wasn't looking carefully. Now, however, Trent had pointed him out.

Shade took a step forward into the light, and Lucas jumped in shock. "Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed. "Is thatâ€¦?"

Matt walked forward. "A dragon?" he asked. "You bet."

"Butâ€¦| But how?" Lucas asked.

"I don't know," Matt lied, not wanting to trust Lucas with that kind of information yet. "But he's real. Pure flesh and blood."

"Waitâ€¦|" said Lucas, shaking his head. "This is fucking nutsâ€¦| There's no way that's a real dragon." He threw his cigarette to the ground and stamped it out. "Someone's been messin' with my smokes."

"If it's any consolation," said Ben. "That was my first reaction too."

"It was better than Joey's," said Trent.

"Hey!" Joey protested.

"No wayâ€¦| No fucking way," Lucas muttered. He stepped towards Shade slowly, being careful not to make any sudden movements. The dragon watched him with calm, curious eyes.

"He's not going to attack me if I get too close, is he?" Lucas asked.

"Not unless you threaten any of us," Matt replied. "And besides, he's not like that. He's not an animal in the true sense of the word. He's just as intelligent as any of us, if not more so."

Lucas looked stunned. "He's that smart, huh?"

"Oh yeah," Trent agreed. "Hang out with him for one day, and you'll agree."

Lucas walked forward until he was right in front of Shade. He appeared nervous, but decided to suck it up.

"'Ello, Shade," he said. "Nice to meet you." He held out his hand.

Shade hesitantly lifted his paw and placed it in Lucas's hand. The man shook it, and made eye contact with him.

They held it for just a few seconds, and then Shade broke it. He backed up to where Matt was and sat, staring him down.

Lucas stood still for a moment, still trying to comprehend the situation. Finally, he said, "Talk about a weird day."

Trent chuckled. "Trust me; every day with us is a weird day. In fact, you would not believe the day I've had, even if you were to go into my head and look through my memories."

"Would that have anything to do with the fact that there's a portal gun attached to Shade's shoulder?" Ben asked.

"Yes, actually," said Matt. "And I know you think you're joking, but that actually is a portal gun."

For once in his life, Ben had no response.

"Anyway," Lucas broke the silence. "What happened to him?" He pointed to Brian. "He looks bad."

"Long story," said Trent. "One I'll tell you later, maybe. That is, if you stay with us."

"Say what?" asked Joey.

"What do you mean?" asked Lucas.

"I mean, you're welcome to stay with us for at least a day or two," Trent replied. "It's the least we can do to repay you. That is, if nobody has any arguments."

Trent looked at his friends. Nobody had any objections.

"So, what do you say?" asked Trent. "I'm sure you could use someone to watch your back."

"Well, I'd say it's you who needs your back watched," Lucas retorted, considering the offer. "But what the hell? Sure, I'll stay for a bit."

"Sweet," said Ben. "Fresh meat."

Lucas gave him a funny look, and then asked, "So, where are you staying?" He chuckled. "I hope it's not here."

"We were staying in the school," Matt replied. "But I don't think we should go back there after all this."

"Yeah," Joey agreed. "And I wouldn't want to go back there even if we could."

"Well, where are we going to go then?" asked Ben.

"There are some houses all along this street," Lucas suggested. "I'm sure those could be safe. I mean, this place'll be swarming with zombies later, but we could board a house up."

"And take one down the street a ways," Matt added.

"Judging by our current conditions, I'd say that's the best option," said Trent. "The only problem is, we'd have to scout one out first. And some of us are wounded."

"I assume you're referring to Brian," said Ben.

"You too," Trent added.

"Fuck that, you're wounded too." Ben pointed to his leg.

"I can handle it. And we'll need at least two people to stay."

"I'll go with you," Lucas offered.

"Also, I think me and Shade should take a trip to the pharmacy," Matt suggested. "You, Ben and Brian are going to need some medication, or those wounds will get infected."

"Shit, I didn't think about that," said Trent.

"I guess that means I'm being left behind again," Ben moped.

"Suck it up," Trent replied. "That's a great idea, Matt. So, I think that settles it. Ben and Joey will stay here with Brian, me and Lucas will go find a house, and Matt and Shade will go the pharmacy."

"Sounds good," said Matt. "Except, I don't know what to get."

"I can help you with that," said Ben. "I know my drugs."

"Alright, great. We're out of here, then. Good luck!" Trent turned and headed for the entrance.

"I'll see you kids later," said Lucas. He started walking away, but after a few steps, he turned back and added, "You know, you guys are alright."

The two men left, and Ben walked over to Matt. "I like that guy," he said.

"Yeah, he's nice I guess," said Matt.

"What do you mean, 'you guess'?"

"Well, we just met him. I mean, I'm sure he's a nice guy and all, It's justâ€¦ I don't know him well enough yet."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," said Ben. "Anyway, get your iPod out, because you're going to need to write this down."

Matt took off his backpack, opened it, and rummaged through it until he found his iPod. He took it out, turned it on, and opened the notepad app.

"So, it's just you, Trent and Brian, right?" Matt asked.

"I think s-" Ben was cut off as Shade walked over to them and nudged Matt's shoulder.

"What?" Matt asked.

Shade gestured to the portal gun attached to his shoulder.

"Oh shit, I forgot about that," said Matt. "Are you going to want to take that out?"

Shade nodded.

"And I assume that since you're able to control that with your mind, it's attached to your spinal cord?"

He nodded again.

"Jesus Christ," said Ben. "First of allâ€¦ What the fuck happened to you, anyway? How did you get an _actual_ portal gun that you can control with your mind? How the hell does something like that happen?"

And second of all, that's going to hurt. A lot. You're going to need some serious shit for that."

"It's a long story," Matt said to Ben. Then, he turned to Shade, and asked, "Are you sure about this?"

The dragon hesitated for a moment, and then nodded.

"Okay," said Ben. "So it's me, Trent, Brian and you. Well, first of all, for my cut, I need some gauze pads and bandages, as well as some hydrogen peroxide to clean it and Bacitracin to prevent infection. Also, some Tylenol for the pain would help." He paused, thinking. "What kind of wound does Trent have?"

"Pretty much the same thing as yours, except on his leg," Matt replied, while typing what Ben had just said.

"Oh, alright. That makes things easy. Get him the same thing. Now, Brianâ€¦ Brian should be okay for the most part. If that cure works, then it will get rid of the disease. But, he'll still have an open wound, so make that three orders of the stuff you're already getting. Are you writing all of this down?"

"Yeah," Matt replied. "What about Shade?"

"Shade is tricky," Ben replied. "Once that thing comes out, it's going to hurt him more than you can imagine. He's going to need a very strong painkiller. I'd recommend Valium. But you're only going to want to give that to him once, so get him some Vicodins.

"Another thing that makes it hard to treat is the fact that he isn't human. Since he's a dragon, and much bigger than us, he's probably going to need more. A lot more. So I would grab as much as you can. Also, get him some bandages and gauze pads as well. No need to expose those openings. And that should be about it."

"Alright. So where do I get all of this?" Matt asked.

"I would say Rite Aid, or the Wal-Mart pharmacy. Wal-Mart might be easier."

"Okay, got it," said Matt. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," said Ben. "Hurry back this time. Oh, and you and Trent owe us an explanation when you get back.

"Don't worry, you'll get one," said Matt. "Let's go, Shade.

Trent and Lucas walked down the road. Now that his adrenaline rush from the fight was wearing off, the pain in Trent's leg was coming back, and he was limping. Lucas asked him about it nervously, and he reassured the newcomer that it wasn't a bite.

They had reached the street in front of the school when Shade flew over their heads. They looked up and marveled at the awesome sight.

"What a strange day this is turning out to be," Lucas commented.

"You don't know the half of it," said Trent. "This has been the weirdest day of my life."

"How so?"

"It's a long story. Besides, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"After seeing that beast you've got with ya, I'd believe anything."

"You'll find out soon enough. But there's something you've got to know if you're staying with us. Shade isn't a 'beast' like you'd think. I know I said he was, but I was joking. I was serious when I said he was smart back there; I wasn't just saying that to keep Matt from getting pissed off. You'll see what I mean in time. The reason I'm telling you this is because..." Trent paused, searching for the words. "He and Matt- _especially _Matt- take offense whenever anyone seriously refers to him as an animal, pet, or anything like that. Because he isn't."

Lucas was silent for a moment. Then, he said, "I'll keep that in mind."

They walked in silence for a few minutes, before Trent finally broke the silence. "So, where are you from, Lucas?"

"Down south," he replied. "I came up here becauseâ€¦ Well, to be honest, I have no idea. I had nowhere to go, so I just started walking, and ended up here."

"How'd you get through the wall?" asked Trent. "I had to go _through _that damn thing. Almost killed me."

"So, you took the idiot's way?" asked Lucas, laughing. "Well, I just stole a plane."

"Where do people keep finding these planes?" asked Trent, exasperated.

"Well, when I found the wall, I couldn't find any way around it. So I backtracked to Boston and took one from Logan International Airport," Lucas replied. "Not sure where it is now." He was silent for a moment. "So, what brings _you _here?"

"Well, if you want to know the truth," Trent began. "I came here because I heard there wasâ€¦ somethingâ€¦ hidden in New Hampshire somewhere."

"What kind of something?" asked Lucas.

"Something that may or may not finish off the zombies once and for all."

Lucas was speechless. "Holy shit," he finally said. "Do you really think you can find something like that?"

"I don't know," Trent replied. "That's what I'm here to find out."

They had walked a good distance down the street, and the school was no longer in sight. "I think somewhere around here should do," said Trent.

"Yeah," Lucas agreed. He looked around, saw something, and pointed. "How about that one there?"

Trent looked to where he was pointed and saw a house. It looked just big enough to shelter the seven of them, without being so big that it would take forever to clear it out and board it up. In other words, it was great. Exceptâ€¦

There was somethingâ€¦ _wrong_ about it. Something Trent couldn't put his finger on. He was almostâ€¦ drawn to it, in a dangerous sort of way.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yeah," Lucas replied. "Trust me, I know a good house when I see it."

"I know it's a good house and all, butâ€¦" Trent searched for the words he was looking for. "Something just doesn't feel right about it."

Lucas snickered. "Come on, don't pussy out on me!" he taunted. "You just survived one of the biggest hordes I've ever seen, and you're scared of a house?"

Trent thought about it. Eventually, he came to the conclusion that it was just his nerves shaken from the attack. "No," he said. "I'm not. I was justâ€¦ I've been through a lot today, and I'm tired. Let's go."

Ben and Joey were waiting around the fire, throwing zombie corpses into it every time it began to die.

"What do you think about Lucas?" Joey asked.

"I like him," said Ben. "What about you?"

"I don't knowâ€¦" said Joey. "He seems nice and all, butâ€¦ I just met him. _We_ just met him. There's no way to tell what he's really like right off the bat."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," said Ben. "I didn't say I trusted him. Just that for now, I liked him. I think we'd be idiots to trust him right off the bat. In fact, I'm pretty sure Trent look him along so he could keep an eye on him."

"Yeah," that makes sense," said Joey. "Well, if he does turn out to be untrustworthy, we have Shade."

"We have Shade," Ben agreed.

Brian opened his eyes.

He found himself next to a fire somewhere, with no memory as to what had happened prior. He heard voices; ones he recognized.

Attempting to sit up, he moaned in fatigue. He had been unconscious for who knows how long, yet at the same time he felt like he hadn't slept in a week.

"Brian!" someone yelled. "You're awake!" He looked to his side and saw Joey and Ben running up to him. "Hey guys," he said weakly.

They helped him to stand up, and supported him until he was reasonably adjusted to being back on his feet. "Where am I?" he asked. "What happened?"

"You're in the auditorium," Joey replied. "There was a problem. We were attacked by zombies while you were out."

"There's something else," Ben added. "You were bitten by a zombie."

Memories of the attack at the gas station came back to him, and he looked at his arm in panic. "Oh God," he said. "How long has it been?"

"Around twenty, twenty-one hours," said Joey.

"Why am I still alive?" he asked urgently. "You should've killed me! You should kill me now!"

"No," said Ben. "We shouldn't. You're all better now. The fact that you woke up proves it."

"What do you mean?" Brian asked. "You can't heal from a zombie bite."

"No. You can't. Unless you have a cure."

"But there is no cure."

"Ah, but there is. And Matt, Trent and Shade risked their lives to get it for you."

"Wait!" said Brian. "They really found a cure?"

"Yeah," said Joey, a tear of happiness forming in his eye. "You're okay, Brian. It's all over now. You've survived."

Shade landed in the parking lot of the Wal-Mart, and allowed Matt to slide off of his back. Together, they walked towards the front door.

He was thinking about Lucas. Compared to everything else that had happened today, the appearance of the man was a small event. But there was something about him that was just wrong.

It wasn't until the two of them had made eye contact that Shade had realized this. While he was looking into the man's eyes, he caught a glimpse of some dangerous knowledge in was hiding something, and Shade didn't trust him. Not one bit.

They reached the door and entered the store. Matt led the way, and Shade kept an eye out for zombies. They made their way to the pharmacy

"Hey, Shade," Matt said when they arrived. "We could use some more food. Do you think maybe you could grab a couple things?"

Shade was hesitant. He knew Matt could look after himself, but he still didn't want to leave him alone. Not after all that had happened.

"We're low on supplies, and if Lucas is going to stay with us, we'll need more," said Matt. "And if anything happens, I'll yell. You'll know where to find me."

He gave in. Matt was right; they did need more food.

_Ben, why did you have to burn down Joey's house? You really screwed us, _ Shade thought. _And besides; burning things is my job._

He nodded, and headed off, sniffing the air and looking for food.

Matt watched him walk off, and then hauled himself over the counter. He walked over to the rack of medicine and began looking through it.

One by one, he found the different medications they needed and stuffed it in his backpack. Every once in a while, he would look around to make sure no zombies were sneaking up on him. None did.

He even found Valium. Before Z-Day, he would've had to go to a doctor's office to get some, but when the military started people into shelters, the wounded were brought to places like pharmacies and grocery stores to be treated. Therefore, all of the drugs available to them were brought here. When these places were overrun, they were left behind.

When he was finally ready to go, he zipped up his backpack, slung it over his shoulder, and turned around.

"Hey, Shade!" he yelled. "You ready?"

Yelling like that was a very risky thing to do. However, Matt was prepared for the potential consequences. He drew his knife and kept watch until Shade arrived, with several cans of food stored in his mouth.

"I see you found something," Matt commented. "Thanks." He took off his backpack, opened it, and held it up to Shade's mouth. The dragon dropped the food- and some drinks, too- into the backpack.

"Alright," Matt said as he zipped up the backpack. "Let's get out of here."

The two of them left the store. In the parking lot, Matt climbed onto Shade's back, and they flew back to the school.

Trent thought that when they got into the house, the strange feeling he felt would go away. It didn't. As soon as he and Lucas opened the door and stepped inside, the feeling got worse.

They were in a hallway that led into a kitchen. Next to them was a flight of stairs. The two of them walked into the kitchen, and another strange feeling briefly passed through Trent's body. It was as if some sort of signal had gone through him, and he had felt it.

"I don't like this," he said. "This place is giving me the creeps."

"Don't be a pussy," Lucas replied, walking ahead of him.

The kitchen was about average-sized. It contained everything a kitchen could need; a stove, an oven, a microwave, a counter, and a table. There was even a fancy-looking chandelier above the table. Granted, it didn't exactly go with the rest of the room, but at least the previous owners had tried.

"Okay," said Trent nervously. "You take upstairs, I'll take downstairs."

"Got it," Lucas replied. He turned and headed for the stairs.

As he was walking up the stairs, two assailants were hiding in a room right at the top, waiting for him.

"You can have this one," one of the them said.

The other one grinned. "Thanks."

As Lucas reached the top of the stairs and rounded the corner, a noise came from the room to his right. As he turned to see what it was, something impacted his skull. All he saw before he lost conscious was a large, purplish blur.

There was a thump from upstairs.

Trent turned around. "Lucas?" he called.

There was no answer.

"Lucas!"

Silence.

"Shit," he muttered to himself. "I knew this place was bad. And yet we came here anyway."

Suddenly, a thumping noise came from the other side of the house. "Hello?" he called.

It's probably a zombie, he thought.

He made his way towards the source of the sound, and found a back door someone had left open.

Nervously, he walked outside and looked to the left. Nothing. He looked to the right.

Before his mind had a chance to register what he was seeing, the person waiting for him sprung. All he saw was a flash of yellow, and

then he was on the ground. His assailant's fists crashed into his face, his chest, and his arms. They cascaded all over his body, bringing fresh pain with every blow. Trent screamed for help, but nobody heard his calls.

"Stop!" he begged between punches. "Please!"

His attacker landed one more blow to his jaw, and then got off of him. As they stood over him, they placed their foot on his chest, holding him down.

Trent couldn't tell who his attacker was. They were covered from head to toe in yellow, baggy pants, and a yellow jacket with a hood that covered everything except for their eyes.

"Ah," said a new voice. "We meet again."

Trent recognized the voice. It was the one from Aperture. The man who had attacked them.

His head whipped towards the source of the voice. He saw another person- one he could only assume was a man, judging from the voice- who was dressed entirely in black. He wore a black cloak, a black hood, and a black face mask. Again, the only thing Trent could see was his eyes.

"I'm sorry about my friend here. She can be a bitâ€¦ Aggressive."

"I'll say," Trent said, practically coughing out the words. "What the fuck do you want from me? And what did you do with Lucas?"

"Hmmm," said the man. "Lucasâ€¦ So that's his nameâ€¦ He's fine, don't worry. He's just not conscious right now. As for what I want with you? Wellâ€¦ We have someâ€¦ unfinished business."

"Is this because of what happened in Aperture?" Trent asked.

The man chuckled. "Very good," he said. Suddenly, he got serious. "Yes. It has everything to do with that. That little stunt you pulled there effectively destroyed our entire operation. Do you have any idea how long we've been working at this?"

"Who's we?" asked Trent. "And what's this?"

"What we've been doing isn't important to you," the man replied. "And by we, I mean me and my friends. A 'gang' of sorts. Except, we're more dangerous than any gang you've ever heard of, and that includes those idiots in Gunnerville that everyone fears for reasons that are beyond me. But those matters aside; you killed GLaDOS, and she was the one fueling our operation. Now that she's goneâ€¦ Everything is destroyed!"

The man walked over and leaned down to him, staring in his face. "I'm going to let you off with a warning this time. But if I ever catch you interfering with us again, I will kill you. Understand?"

Trent nodded. "You know, none of this would've happened if you hadn't left us there to die."

The man sighed. "I didn't want to, but I had no choice. I had a deal with GLaDOS" He shook his head. "Never mind that."

He put his hand in Trent's left pocket and felt around in it. Finding nothing, he switched to the other pocket and found the flash drive.

"No" Trent breathed.

He pulled it out and held it up, examining it.

"Please, don't take that," said Trent. "You don't realize how important that is."

"You took something important from me," said the man. "It's only right that I take something back."

"No!" Trent yelled, struggling to get free. "No, please! Anything but that!"

"You know, I might just hold onto this," said the man. "Whatever's in here must be interesting."

"I won't let you get away with this!" Trent yelled.

"Oh yes," said the man. "You will. You won't be able to find me, and if I were to ever find out that you're looking, well It'll be the last thing you ever try to do." He nodded to the woman pinning him down. "Finish him."

"No!" he yelled one more time, as the woman's fist came crashing into his skull, knocking him out.

"Good job," said the man. "Now go get the others in the house and meet me at the car. We're done here."

* * *

><p>Alright, how do you like them apples?

Same time, next week. Let me know how you liked this one!

18. Chapter Seventeen: Newcomers

**Hey guys, sorry again for the delay! I was able to get this chapter done, at least. **

On an unrelated note, how excited are you guys for _How To Train Your Dragon 2?_ I can't wait for it. I've already pre-ordered my tickets.

**Anyway, here is the next part of this story.
Enjoy!**

Disclaimer: I do not own HTTYD or Night Furies

* * *

><p>Chapter

Seventeen:

****Newcomers****

****Stevensonville, New Hampshire****

Several minutes after Trent's assault, two gray vans were driving down Brown Hill Road in Stevensonville. The one in front was driven by the man who had stolen Trent's flash drive, and also held two of his accomplices. The one behind him was driven by the women who had attacked Trent, as well as a third accomplice.

As they drove, the man turned to the person sitting next to him. "You did great back there," he said. "Next time I need a job like that done, you'll be the first person I go to."

She said nothing in return, but acknowledged his compliment with a nod.

The man turned his attention back to the road as they entered the intersection on the border with Lyndrich, and was greeted with the sight of ten men standing in his path. They were each wearing blue jeans, bulletproof vests, and gas masks. They were each carrying guns and pointing them at the oncoming cars.

"Well isn't that great," said the man. "And here I was, thinking the ride back would be uneventful. And then these idiots show up again." He sighed, stopped the car, and put it in park. "Stay in here," he ordered his passengers. "I'll handle this."

He unbuckled his seatbelt and exited the car. As he revealed himself, the men seemed to get tenser.

The one in front spoke up. He was Latino, and slightly bigger than the others; taller, and more muscular. In addition, he was clearly in charge.

"Well if it isn't the Man in Black," he said.

"Okay, really?" the Man in Black asked. "I know I dress up in black and all, but why the Man in Black? There are so many better nicknames you could give me. The Man in Black? Really?"

"It's either that or the Great Fuckhead. Your choice," the leader replied.

"So, how have you been, Assnose?" The Man in Black asked, changing the subject.

"You know I hate being called that."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Carlton. Is that better?"

"Just shut up. We've had enough of you. We're going to put a stop to this today."

The Man in Black laughed. "Oh Carlton," he said. "When will you learn? Tell you what; I'm feeling very confident today. I think I'll take you on. All by myself."

Carlton and his men started laughing. "That's a good one," he said. Suddenly, his voice became serious. "Kill him."

The Man in Black lunged forward as Carlton's men began shooting. Many of the rounds missed, and those that didn't seemed to have no effect on him. He just kept coming.

When he was about to meet them, his hands flew to his sides in a crisscross pattern and drew two razor sharp katanas. He reached the first man and slashed across his chest, cutting his vest. He was careful not to cut too deep into the skin; he didn't want to kill the man, but only incapacitate him. He succeeded in this, and bought enough time to strike him in the head with the sword's handle.

The blow was hard enough to knock the man out. The other men kept firing, but they were beginning to realize it was a lost cause. Finally, two of them charged at the Man in Black, raising the butts of their guns to use as clubs.

He was prepared for them, and kicked the first one square in the chest. The force of the blow made him stagger backwards, while the second man kept coming. He swung his gun at him, but the Man in Black caught it with one hand and, with the other, smashed the man's head with his sword. He then turned and smashed the other one's head.

Three more were coming. Using his katanas, he severed the first one's right arm, causing him to drop to the ground, screaming in agony. He kicked him right in the skull, and he was down. The second man saw this, and he faltered for a moment. The Man in Black took advantage of this, and brought his foot up, kicking the gun out of the man's hand. Then, he brought the handles of both of his katanas into the sides of the man's head, knocking him out cold.

By this time, two more had joined the remaining man, who had reached the Man in Black. The Man in Black bent down and swung his katanas, slicing off one of the man's legs and causing him to fall. He stomped on his head, knocking him out.

The other two kept coming, and a ninth one joined them. The Man in Black waited for them to get closer, and then kicked one square in the jaw, bringing the handle of his right katana onto the other one's forehead. He then brought his left one into the other one's face. They both dropped.

The other one stopped, as if he were debating whether or not to keep fighting. Eventually, he must've decided that it was hopeless. He turned around and ran.

Carlton turned with him. "Stop!" he shouted. "This is your last warning!"

"I'm sorry!" yelled the man.

Carlton lifted his gun and shot him square in the back of the head. The man dropped in a cloud of blood.

"There will be no pansies in my town!" he yelled angrily.

"No pansies?" asked the Man in Black. "But I'm looking at

one."

Carlton's head whipped back to him. "What did you just say?" he seethed.

"You heard me. You haven't lifted a finger except for shooting at me this entire time, while these men risked their lives fighting for you. And then, when one of them tries to save himself, you shoot him in the back." The Man in Black shook his head in disgust. "You might see your failures to defeat me as failures of your men, or lack of preparation, or whatever, but the truth is far simpler than that." He stared Carlton right in the eye. "It is because you are a dirty, rotten coward."

Carlton gave a yell of rage and ran towards him. He raised his gun to bash him with it, but the Man in Black was faster. He brought the handles of both of his katanas into Carlton's stomach, knocking the wind out of him. He then kicked him square in the face and knocked him to the ground.

Cleaning the blood off of his katanas with his cloak, the Man in Black walked up to Carlton and put his foot on his chest, placing his katanas back in their sheaths. "Once again you have underestimated me," he observed. "That was the first time I've tried that tactic. I think it went well. Don't you?"

Carlton said nothing; he merely spat at him.

"I don't know why I keep sparing you, Assnose," said the Man in Black. "You're the worst kind of person. Maybe it's because I just don't want to be like you. But, I've made up my mind. Next time, I won't be so kind. Think about that."

Without waiting for a reply, he lifted up his foot and brought it down on Carlton's face, knocking him out. He then turned around and went back to the car, leaving the bloodstained battlefield behind him.

Back in the PAC, Matt and Shade had returned. They were waiting around the fire in the auditorium- keeping it alight with zombie corpses- for Trent and Lucas to return. Matt and Joey had helped to clean and bandage Ben and Brian's wounds, and gave them some of the Bacitracin and Tylenol to prevent infections and pain.

That had been a while ago, and Trent and Lucas still weren't back. The five of them were starting to get worried. They were debating whether or not to send someone after them, when the doors opened.

They all turned to look, and saw Lucas walk through the doors, his left hand holding the side of his head, with Trent limping behind him, covered from head to toe with dried blood and bruises.

"Jesus Christ," said Matt.

"What the hell happened to you?" asked Ben.

"We got a house for you," said Lucas. "But it took a while. There were some lunatics waiting for us in one of them."

"What are you talking about?" asked Joey.

"It was him," Trent said, looking at Matt. "From the lab. He found us."

"Oh God..." Matt trailed off. Next to him, Shade tensed up, and had a worried look on his face.

"He wasn't alone, either," Lucas added. "We went to clear out a house. I went upstairs, and boom, someone hit me on the head. Next thing I know, Trent's shaking me awake who knows how long later, and we went to find a different house."

"Heâ€¦ He took my flash drive," said Trent.

They were all silent. The feeling of disappointment was almost too great to bear. They had all wanted the zombies gone, and losing the flash drive was possibly the worst thing that could've happened to them, outside of losing one of their own.

"So it's over?" Matt asked. "Our mission to stop the zombies? Just like that?"

"I don't know," said Trent. "I'd rather die than give up the mission, but I can't without the flash drive. All of the leads I was going to investigate were in there."

They all stood in silence for a minute. Then, Trent spoke.

"I'm going to get it back," he said.

They all looked at him. "What?" asked Ben.

"I'm going to get it back," Trent repeated. "I'm going to hunt that motherfucker down and get my flash drive back." He didn't mention that the man had threatened to kill him if he did. To him, nothing was more important than his mission.

"I'll help you," Ben offered.

"No," said Trent. "It's too dangerous."

"Then how are you going to do it by yourself?" he asked.

"I'll help," Lucas offered. "Leave this one to the adults."

Ben didn't argue, but he looked furious.

"Come on," said Trent. "Let's get back to the house."

When they got back to the house, they started boarding it up. Matt was working on some windows, with Shade bringing him more materials when they needed it. They were using whatever they could find; wood, cloth, furniture, etc. The point was to prevent the zombies from noticing them.

When they were done, Trent and Joey started a fire and they gathered around it, cooking some of the food Shade had found. In the background, the song "You Should Have Killed Me When You Had the Chance" by A Day To Remember played. During this time, they each

shared the stories of what had happened.

First, Trent and Matt told their story. They told them everything; from the man who had attacked them (and had also attacked Trent and Lucas earlier that day), to the testing, to the escape. The others sat there listening, with expression ranging from astonishment to pure disbelief.

When they were finished, Lucas was the first to call them out on it.

"That has _got _to be the most ridiculous story I've ever heard," he said. "Now, what I think happened was that y'all got hungry and ate some of the wrong mushrooms."

Matt smirked. "Hey, Shade, does that thing still work?" he asked.

Shade grinned and shot a portal at the wall, and another next to it. Lucas stared at it in disbelief.

"Well I'll be fucked in the ass," he breathed.

"Does it work?" asked Brian.

"I don't know," said Trent. "Why don't you try it out?"

Hesitantly, Brian got up and stepped through the portal. When he emerged from the other one, he stumbled slightly. "Jeez," he said. "That's the weirdest thing I've ever done!"

Everyone else was completely silent. Nobody had any idea what to say. Eventually, the rest of them got up and tried it as well.

For the next few minutes, Shade and the others messed around with the portal gun. Ben, Joey and Brian seemed to be having the most fun with it as well. One time, they asked Shade to put one on the ceiling and one on the floor, and then began falling in an endless loop.

Eventually, however, they became bored of it, and returned to the fire.

"So, what's your story?" Trent asked Ben and Joey.

Together, Ben and Joey explained their story, excluding the part about the fight that they had had. They explained the zombie horde, and the fight through the classrooms, all the way to the point where Matt, Trent and Shade had rescued them.

"Then, they came and killed the rest of the zombies," Ben explained to Brian. "They gave you the cure, but more showed up. Lucas here saved our lives."

"Thanks, Lucas," said Brian. They had introduced the two to each other earlier, but they hadn't had any time to get to know one another. Until now, Brian had barely known why he was with them at all.

"No problem," Lucas replied. "Besides, I can't pass up a good zombie

killing spree. Say, you people don't have anything to drink, do you?"

"Noâ€¦" said Ben, mournfully, as if he were talking about a lost friend. "The alcohol's all goneâ€¦"

"That's a damn shame."

"So, what's your story, Lucas?" asked Matt.

"Wellâ€¦" he thought for a moment, while lighting a cigarette. "I was a bartender down in Atlanta. Worked the night shift; slept all day, served drinks all night. My father- his name was Jack- was a doctor, and he always pushed me to do something more with my life." He paused to take a whiff of his cigarette. "What he didn't understand was that I was perfectly happy where I was."

He took another breath of smoke. "I always thought it was kind of funny. People came to me for beer. A lot of those people would end up going to my dad right after that.

"I didn't really know my mother. She left us when I was only two. I had an older brother, Aiden. He was the one my dad was proud of. He went off to college, got a degree, all that bullshit. He's a physicist." He laughed. "Doctor, physicist, bartender. Nobody's really sure how that happened.

"It never really bothered me though. My life was simple, and that's how I liked it. I had a few friends who were pretty much the same. Once a week, we'd go out drinking, get laid, have a good time, all that stuff."

He took another puff from his cigarette. "All this zombie stuff started the same as it did everywhere else. There were a lot of disappearances on the news, and such. Me and my friends didn't really think much of it. But then, Z-Day came."

He paused again, but not to smoke. He had a haunted look on his face. "That was a horrible day. But I think you all know that. Most of my friends died. The few that survived died in the next couple months. Aiden and my dad joined a group of doctors, scientists, the whole shebang. They said they were trying to find a cure." He took another smoke. "Their headquarters was overrun in a week. Military bailed on 'em for no good reason. No survivors.

"Once America fell, I didn't know what to do. So I just started walking. Every once in a while, I'd settle down for a couple of weeks; usually if I liked the area or ran into any survivors. But I'd always move on.

"Now, about a week ago I ran into this huge wall. I think you all know what I'm talking about. So, I backtracked to Boston, and stole a plane from Logan Airport. I flew- and crashed- over the wall." He took another smoke. "And that was yesterday."

"Why the hell didn't we think of that?" asked Ben. "I could've stayed with my Viper for a little longer!"

"Fuck your Viper!" Joey exclaimed.

"Fuck you, you little jackwagon!"

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know, but it's an insult!"

Matt watched in amusement as Ben and Joey started arguing. Before it could get too heated, Shade got between them. He jumped across the fire and pinned the two of them to the ground.

"Hey, what gives?" asked Joey.

Shade laughed.

A little while later, Matt and Shade decided that it was time for bed. Seeing as they were the first to go, they got the privilege of choosing the first bedroom.

There were three bedrooms upstairs, and since they didn't really care, they choose the first one. Once Matt moved all of his stuff up there, he wanted to take care of one more thing; Shade's portal gun.

"Wait here," he told the dragon. "I need to get Ben."

He went downstairs and approached his friend. "Ben," he said. "I need your help with Shade's portal gun."

"Okay," he said. "I'll be right up."

Matt waited for him outside his bedroom. When he arrived, he said, "Come downstairs for a minute. I need to talk to you in private."

Matt followed him downstairs. When they were alone, Ben asked, "How much Valium did you get?"

"A lot," Matt replied.

"Okay, we probably won't need all of it."

"Why not?"

"Because you're only going to want to use it this once. That stuff is highly addictive, and Valium addiction is VERY dangerous. We don't want an addict on our hands, ESPECIALLY not one who's a dragon. Now, tomorrow, he's still going to need some painkillers. That's where the Vicodins come in."

"How much should I give him?" Matt asked.

"I'd say about six the first day," Ben replied. "Three in the morning, three at night. Maybe five the second day, and so on. But Vicodins are highly addictive too, so we need to come up with a system. Whenever you give Shade his medicine, I want you to ask him how much it hurts. Tell him to draw it, on a scale of 1 to 20."

His voice lowered to the faintest whisper. "Now, for his sake, _do not_ tell him this next part. If you do, he might lie to you about how much it hurts so he can have more. If he says 8 or lower, don't

give him anymore. He can suck it up and take it from there on. If it really hurts, give him an ice pack or something- I don't know how, but you can find a way. But whatever you do, DON'T give him anymore, no matter how much he begs. Understand?"

Matt nodded. "Yeah, I got it."

"Good. Now let's go take care of that portal gun."

They took a flashlight and went upstairs to where Shade was waiting in the bedroom. "Alright, sit down," said Matt.

Shade walked over to them and did as he was asked. He was ready.

"Get me the Valium," Ben requested. Matt handed him a bottle and a syringe.

As he was putting a dose together, he explained what he was going to do. "You're a dragon, Shade," he said.

"Thank you, Captain Obvious," said Matt.

"Let me finish, asshole," Ben scolded. "You're a dragon, so you need a lot more than me or Matt would. I'd sayâ€¦ About four of these would do."

"Jeez," Matt commented. "That's a lot."

"I'll say. That would do bad things to one of us. _Very_ bad things."

Ben finished putting the syringe together and gave it to Matt. "Inject him with this," he said.

Matt ran his hands under the scales along Shade's neck and leg, searching for a pulse. It was hard, with all of the scales in the way, but he eventually found one. "This might sting just a little bit," he said.

He felt the dragon brace himself, but when he slid the needle in, he calmed down. It wasn't as bad as he'd expected.

Matt injected the Valium into his bloodstream, and then removed the needle. "One down, three to go," he said, handing the syringe back to Ben.

They injected Shade three more times. By the time they were done, it was obvious that the drug was having an effect. He had a dazed look, and didn't seem to care about anything that was going on.

Ben saw this and laughed.

"What's so funny?" asked Matt.

"He's basically stoned right now," Ben replied. "In a few minutes he's going to be out cold. We should wait until then."

"Okay," said Matt. "Shade, go to bed."

Sleepily, Shade jumped onto the bed- a large, king-sized- and curled up, wings folded, and tail fin covering his face. His right shoulder, the one with the portal gun, was facing up. Ben and Matt waited, and several minutes later, he was in a deep sleep.

"Alright, let's get to work," said Ben. They walked over and positioned themselves on either side of Shade's shoulder. Before they started, Matt asked, "You sure he won't feel this?"

"If he does, we didn't give him enough Valium," Ben replied. He began examining the portal gun. "Now, how does this work? Oh!"

"What?" asked Matt.

"Look here." Ben pulled back some of Shade's scales and pointed to a wire that was going into his flesh. "This is where it's attached. It looks like it's going deep, so we'll have to be careful. Also, it looks like there's four of them."

"Okay," said Matt. They each grabbed onto a wire, and started gently pulling them out. Shade twitched and grunted in his sleep, but was otherwise undisturbed.

When they were both out, they focused on the other two. When those were out, they observed the holes left. They were very small, but they were beginning to ooze blood. The wires were wet and shiny with dragon blood as well.

"Give me those bandages," said Ben. Matt went into his backpack passed him the bandages, and Ben wrapped some around Shade's right shoulder and wing, covering the open wounds. "You can probably take those off tomorrow," said Ben.

"Will he be able to fly?" Matt asked.

"That's up to him," Ben replied. "He may or may not be up for it."

"Alright." Matt handed him the portal gun. "Here, see if you can get that to work without being attached to someone. I have to go to bed now."

"Sweet," said Ben. "Thanks. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," Matt replied.

Ben left the room, and Matt collapsed on the bed next to Shade. It had been one of the longest days of his life, and he was exhausted. He didn't even bother taking off his shoes, or getting under the covers. He was asleep almost as soon as his head hit the pillows.

Matt and Shade were so tired that they slept until around twelve o'clock the next morning. When Matt finally woke up, feeling well rested, he saw that Shade was still sleeping like a baby. Not wanting to bother his friend, he immediately went downstairs to eat breakfast.

He was surprised to see that Ben, Joey and Lucas were already up. He knew that Joey wasn't a late sleeper, and had no idea what Lucas'

sleeping habits were, but Ben had never gotten up before him.

"Holy shit," Ben remarked. "I actually got out of bed before you."

"I know, right?" asked Matt. "That's a first."

"Yeah. Anyway, how's he doing?"

"Shade?" Matt asked. "He's still asleep."

"Not for long," Ben said. "He's going to wake up in a very bad mood."

Sure enough, Matt heard ragged footsteps coming down the stairs, as well as pained warblings. "Shade!" he called. "Are you okay?"

He ran over to the stairs and saw Shade entering the living room, limping. His right wing was held at an awkward angle by the bandages, and he was very obviously in intense pain.

Matt ran over to him and laid a reassuring hand on his side. "It's okay, buddy," he said. "Just lie down."

Slowly and carefully, Shade dropped onto his belly. He looked up at Matt, meeting his eyes, and whimpered. His gaze seemed to be begging for more Valium.

"I'll get you some in a second," Matt said. "First, I need you to do something for me. On a scale of one to twenty- one being the best and twenty being the worst- tell me how much it hurts."

Shade thought for a moment. His thinking was slightly clouded by the pain, but his head was clear enough to know what was being asked of him. There was a lot of pain, yes; more pain than he'd experienced since the portal gun was put in. But it wasn't the worst he'd felt.

He stretched out a trembling claw and carved the number eighteen into the wooden floor.

"Okay," said Matt. "I can't give you any more Valium, but I can give you something just as good." He ran upstairs to get the Vicodins.

"You alright?" Joey asked in concern.

Shade shook his head.

"What happened?"

"We took the portal gun out of his shoulder," said Ben. "It's going to take a bit before that heals."

Matt came down with the bottle of Vicodins. Opening it, he poured three pills into his hand and held them out to Shade.

The dragon lapped up the pills and swallowed them without hesitation. Then, his head dropped to the floor and his eyes closed as he waited for them to take effect.

"Ben, how long until these work?" Matt asked.

"About thirty minutes to an hour," he replied.

Shade's eyes snapped open and he whimpered.

Matt knelt down on his left side and rubbed his back comfortingly. "Hey," he said. "Talk to me, somehow. Draw something. Take your mind off of the pain."

An idea came to him. He reached into his pocket, pulled out his iPod, and put one of the earbuds into his left ear. Holding the other, he reached over Shade's neck, found his ear hole, and put it in. He put the iPod on shuffle, and Rise Against's "Swing Life Away" came up.

Perfect, he thought. _A nice, soothing song._

"Let's go in the other room for a minute," he suggested. "I want to talk to you in private."

Grunting in pain, Shade stood up. Matt helped support him. He was heavy, and it took a lot of effort, but he eventually succeeded.

They walked into a sitting room, with a couch, a wooden floor, a coffee table, and a TV. Pushing the table out of the way, he helped Shade sit down in the middle, and knelt next to him.

"I've been meaning to ask you this, but I haven't gotten the chance," he said. "Back in the labâ€¦ When you had thatâ€¦ freak outâ€¦ Was that because of something that happened to you before we met?"

Shade nodded.

"Okayâ€¦" Matt trailed off, unsure of how to proceed. "If you want to talk about it, I'm here for you."

Shade considered. He had never planned on telling Matt what had happened to him. It wasn't that he didn't trust him with the information- he did- but he didn't want to relive those memories. So he had built a wall around them.

Exceptâ€¦ That hadn't worked.

It was right then that he realized that he was tired of running from his past. He _needed_ to tell someone; if not for his sake than for his friends. He had almost killed them before.

He nodded at Matt, and started drawing on the hardwood floor.

Over the next hour or so, they sat there, listening to music, while Shade told his story through drawings and motions. Every once in a while, Matt would ask a question to clarify things, but other than that, he didn't say a word.

He only listened.

Later on, the pain in Shade's shoulder had reduced to a dull thud. He

was walking about freely now, and Matt had removed the bandages. Not only was he feeling physically better, but _mentally _as well.

Now that he had told Matt about what happened to him before they met, he felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from his chest. He hadn't felt this good in days.

When they were done, he had scratched out all the drawings he had made on the floor. Although he had told Matt, he didn't really want anyone else to know.

Matt, on the other hand, was having mixed feelings. He had had an idea that what had happened to Shade was bad, but he had no idea it was _that _bad.

I swear, if I ever find out that Corvus is still alive, I will personally hunt him to the end of the Earth and put a bullet in his skull, he thought.

Still, seeing how much he had helped Shade lightened his mood a lot. He could tell that his friend had finally let go of the past, and that made him happy.

Later that day, Trent proposed an idea.

"I know you and Shade got some supplies yesterday," he said to Matt. "And we're all grateful for that, but we could use some more." He then turned to the rest of the group. "Me and Lucas are going scavenging. Anyone else like to come?"

"I will," said Ben. "I'm tired of being cooped up inside. I need to get out and do something!"

"I'm with Ben," said Joey. "You've already left us behind twice; it's our turn!"

"Sure," said Trent. "The more the merrier."

"What about me?" asked Brian.

"No," said Trent. "You need to rest. You look better than you did yesterday, but you still look terrible."

It was true. Brian wasn't the skeleton of a man he was yesterday, but he was still pale and skinny.

"When?" he asked. "When will I be better?"

"Give it a couple more days," said Ben. "Trent's right; you really shouldn't be putting yourself in danger."

Brian sighed. "Fine," he said. "I'll stay."

"Me and Shade will stay too," said Matt. "Nobody is left alone."

Shade nodded in agreement.

"Alright then," said Trent.

"See ya later!" Lucas exclaimed. He stepped out the door first, flicking his cigarette behind him.

The others followed him. Matt watched them go, and then noticed that Shade was watching Lucas in a rather strange way.

"What's wrong?" Matt asked.

Shade didn't reply.

"You don't trust him, do you?"

Shade shook his head.

"Hmm," Matt grunted. He sat down on a couch, thinking.

The group that left split up. Ben and Joey went looking for food and drink at Wal-Mart, while Trent and Lucas went to the gun store to see if there was anything they could salvage.

Ben and Joey were currently in the drinks aisle. "Li quor, oh liquorâ€¦ Where the fuck art thou, oh liquor?" Ben muttered.

Joey laughed.

"Oh wait," said Ben. "We're in Wal-Mart, and there _is _no fucking liquor. Liquor store, here we come."

Suddenly, there was a crash from the aisle next to them. Ben and Joey immediately stopped and looked at each other. Ben motioned with his hands for them to split up and flank whatever it was that had made the noise, and drew his Bowie knife.

Joey nodded, and drew the switch blade that Ben had given to him. He backed out of the aisle, and slowly turned into the next one. Ben hadn't reached it yet, but Joey knew he was making his way there. He started walking down the aisle, knife at the ready, when he heard a click behind him.

"If I were you," said a woman's voice. "I wouldn't move."

Joey stopped, and slowly raised his hands. "Fuck youâ€¦" he whispered.

"What was that?"

"I said don't shoot."

Ben hadn't shown up yet. Joey came to the conclusion that he was making his way behind his attacker to help him. He just had to buy him some trente.

"Turn around," said the woman.

Joey slowly turned to face his attacker. She was thin, of about average height, and about his age. Her hair was dark brown, with streaks of dark red along it, and dark brown eyes. She was wearing a loose pair of blue jeans and a black T-shirt underneath a black hoodie, and she was wearing a backpack.

"Drop the knife," she ordered.

Joey let go of the switch blade, and it clattered to the floor. He winced at the sudden noise, and prayed that no zombies were in the immediate vicinity.

"I don't want any trouble," he said.

"Why are you here?" she asked

"Why am I- What does that matter?" he asked. "We were just looking for foo-"

"We?" she asked. "Who's we?"

"Me and him," came Ben's voice from behind her.

Suddenly, Ben's Bowie knife appeared at her throat. She tensed up, and breathed slowly in exasperation. "Shit," she said.

"You should know by now that survivors almost always come in groups," he scolded. "Speaking of which—" In one motion, his hand flew to his waist, and he drew his gun, pointing it in the opposite direction. "Drop it," he ordered.

Behind him, another clattering noise sounded.

"Silly rabbit," he said. "Tricks are for kids."

"That was terrible," said another girl's voice.

"Hey!" Ben yelled. "Did I say you could talk?"

The distraction was just enough for the first girl to make her move. With one movement, she elbowed Ben in the crotch and pushed his knife away. While Ben cupped his groin in agony, she punched him in the face and pushed him to the ground, pointing the gun at his face.

Joey knew now was the time to act. He whipped out his pistol, praying that the girls wouldn't realize it wasn't loaded.

I hope Trent and Lucas find what they're looking for, he thought.
Having no ammo sucks.

He cocked the gun and yelled, "Okay, that's it!"

Both girls looked at him, and for the first time he got a glimpse of the other attacker. She was about the same age as the other, and also of about average height. Her silvery-white hair was cut choppy short at her shoulders, and she wore a pair of square glasses that covered her turquoise-blue eyes. She wore a blue buttoned jacket and khaki pants, and she was holding a large hunting knife and wearing a backpack with some sort of cannon device attached to it. A feeling of recognition stirred in his head, but he ignored it.

"I don't want to shoot this gun, but god dammit, I will!" He shouted angrily. "We were just looking for food. We don't want trouble. I'll put down my gun if you put down yours."

The brown-haired girl stared at him, unmoving.

"I'm going to count to three," he said. "Threeâ€|"

The girl kept staring at him.

"Twoâ€| Oneâ€|"

Slowly, he began to lower his gun, hoping the girl would do the same. She did. Joey holstered his gun.

"Ben, put yours away," he said.

Ben holstered his gun and knife, and Joey bent over to pick up his switchblade and put it in his pocket.

"Who are you?" asked the girl.

"I'm Joey, and this is Ben," he said. "I'm sorry about him, by the way. He gets a little aggressive."

"Why the hell are you apologizing for me?" asked Ben, who was getting to his feet. "I might have saved your life!"

"Who are you?" Joey asked, ignoring Ben. "And why did you attack us?"

The girl took a breath. "I didn't know you. And we've had some run-ins withâ€| unpleasantâ€| survivors before. Thugs, raiders, ruffians, whatever you call them, there's plenty of them out there."

"We aren't like that," said Joey. "We're just here for food. That's all."

"Well forgive me if I don't trust you right away," she said in a sneer.

"You never answered my question," said Joey. "I told you who we were, now you tell us who you are."

She sighed. "My name's Alena. And this is my friend-"

"Samantha," the other girl interrupted. "Samantha White."

Joey's eyes widened with shock. He met Ben's gaze, and an unspoken message went between them.

"What did you say?" asked Ben.

"Samantha White," Samantha repeated, frowning in confusion.

A chill ran up Joey's spine. "Benâ€| Can I talk to you for a second? In private?"

"Sure," said Ben.

They stepped aside, into another aisle, and started talking in whispers.

"Did she just say her name was Samantha White?" asked Joey.

"I think so," said Ben. "It's probably just coincidence."

"No," said Joey. "She looks exactly the same as she did in the drawings. No coincidences are that big. There's something else going on here."

"Well what do you think we should do?"

Joey paused for a moment, thinking. "Invite them to stay with us tonight," he said.

"Are you out of your mind?" he asked. "They just tried to kill us!"

"I know, but I really can't blame them, if they're telling the truth about why. We'd do the same. And I wouldn't be saying this if it wasn't for her. This is too big to be a coincidence, and we need to find out more about her. This is important, I can feel it."

"I don't know," said Ben. He thought for a moment, and then said, "Well I guess we could use some women around. We need some more diversity."

"Yeah," Joey agreed. "And we'll keep an eye on them. I'm not letting my guard down just like that; I just have a feeling about this."

Back in the other aisle, Alena and Samantha were talking as well.

"What do you mean, you want to go with them?" asked Alena.

"You saw how they reacted when I told them who I was," Samantha replied. "They know something, and I want to know what."

"We just met these people," Alena said in a hushed whisper. "We know nothing about them. They could be dangerous, for all we know!"

"I'm willing to take that risk," Samantha replied. "They know something about who I was, I can feel it. And I need to know."

"I don't know," said Alena. "I don't like it."

"If they start getting dangerous, we'll leave," Samantha proposed. "I promise."

"Fine," Alena caved. "But I don't like it."

Joey and Ben returned then. "So," Joey began. "Are you two alone?"

"What's it to you?" asked Alena harshly.

"Yeah, it's just the two of us," said Samantha, who was rewarded by a glare from Alena.

"Well, We've got more people back at our house," said Ben. "You're

welcome to stay with us for a night or two, if you want."

"Sure," said Samantha. "We were going to look for a place to stay anyway."

"Alright," said Ben. "Help us get some food, and we'll bring you to our house."

Matt was sitting on the couch, bored out of his mind. Next to him, Brian had been doing the same thing, but was fortunate enough to fall asleep. Shade wasn't there; he had gone on a hunting trip. He hadn't wanted to leave at first, but Matt persuaded him that they needed fresh meat.

He was about to get up and check all the windows for zombies for the umpteenth time, when he heard voices.

Straining, he recognized Ben and Joey's, as well as a few he didn't recognize. They sounded like girls.

He got up and looked out the window, through a crack in the boards, and his suspicions were confirmed. Ben and Joey were walking up to the house with two new survivors, both women.

They reached the door and knocked. "Who is it?" Matt called, jokingly.

"You know damn well who it is, now open the door!" Ben yelled.

"What's the password?"

"The password is: Fuck you, open the door."

Matt was silent for a moment. Then he said, "That's correct." He pushed back the cabinet that they had used to block the door and let them in.

"Who're they?" he asked, pointing to the two girls. Up close, he was able to observe them more clearly, and as he did so, he realized that one of them- the silver-haired one- looked vaguely familiar.

"This is Alena," Ben said, pointing to the brunette. "And this," he pointed to the silver-haired one, the one that looked familiar. "Is Samantha White."

Matt was shocked. _Noâ€|_ he said. _No, that's impossibleâ€|_ Ben's playing a joke on me, he has to be._

Not wanting to be rude, he offered his hand out. "I'm Matt," he said.

Samantha took it first. Alena didn't really seem to trust him, but shook his hand anyway.

"Come in," he said.

They entered the room, and Matt asked, "Where'd you find these two?"

"At Wal-Mart," Joey replied. "We had a little disagreement, but it's all better now." He saw Brian asleep on the couch. "Hey!" he yelled. "Wake up, sleepy-head!"

Brian was startled awake. "Wha? What's goings on?" he asked, before coming to his senses. "Oh, hey Joey," he said. "Back already?"

"Yeah," he said. "You fell asleep."

"Yeah," Brian confirmed. "I was bored. Who're these two?"

While Joey introduced Brian to Alena and Samantha, Matt pulled Ben out of the room. "You're joking, right?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Samantha White? Really? I'm not that dumb. Yeah, I get it, she looks like her, but there's no way."

"Dude, I'm not kidding," said Ben. "For once in my life, I'm completely serious. I don't know how this is possible, but that's her. It's not just name and appearance; everything about her is the same."

"How is this possible?" Matt asked, dumbfounded.

"I don't know," Ben replied. "But unless she's lying about who she is, this is real."

"Jesus," said Matt. "This feels like something that would happen in a Stephen King book."

"Let's hope this doesn't turn out like those do," said Ben.

"Hey Matt!" Joey called. "Where's Shade?"

Matt and Ben walked back into the room. "He's out hunting," he replied. "I convinced him that we could use some fresh meat."

"Who's Shade?" Samantha asked. She was now sitting on the couch next to Alena.

"Ohâ€¦ You mean you haven't told themâ€¦?" asked Matt.

Joey shook his head.

"Ohâ€¦ This'll be fun to watch."

"What?" asked Alena, suspiciously.

"Oh, you'll see soon enough."

There was another knock on the door, and Ben opened it, letting in Trent and Lucas.

"We've got ourselves some heat!" Lucas announced, carrying a bag full of ammo and guns slung over his minigun. "That place is still full!"

"Sweet!" Ben exclaimed. "I got vodka!"

"Awesome!" Lucas gave Ben a high-five.

"Who're these two?" Trent asked.

"A couple of survivors we met up with at Wal-Mart," Joey replied. He quickly introduced them to each other.

"Hello, ladies," said Lucas, attempting to sound smooth.

"Not interested," said Alena.

"That hurts," said Lucas. "I was just saying hi."

"Oh please. I know flirting when I see it."

"Oh!" Ben yelled. "Shot down!"

"Hey, fuck you!" Lucas gave him the finger.

"Something tells me you're a doucheâ€¦!" Samantha said under her breath. Lucas didn't seem to hear; if he did, he ignored it.

"Where's Shade?" Trent asked.

"I persuaded him to go hunting," Matt replied. As soon as he said that, there was a flapping noise outside, and a shadow passed over the windows. "Looks like he's back." He walked over to the window and saw Shade land, carrying two dead bucks. "He's got some! Trent, Lucas and Ben, could you help us carry them in?"

"Sure thing," said Trent.

"Meat!" Ben yelled.

They opened the door again and went out. Matt and Ben picked up one buck and Trent and Lucas picked up the other.

They carried the bucks into the house and brought them over to a closet in a hallway off to the side of the living room. Seeing the ragged claw and teeth marks rather than a gunshot, Samantha stood up. "What the hell did you do to that thing?" she asked.

"Ask him," said Trent, gesturing outside.

"Who-" she was cut off mid-sentence as Shade came into view. Her eyes widened in shock. "What... Is that a..." She began wobbling a little bit. "Oh my God," she said, as she passed out on the couch.

Alena saw Shade, and immediately went for her gun. "No!" Matt yelled, going for his as well. She saw this, and stopped, but remained tense and alert.

"Whatâ€¦! What is that?" she asked, breathless.

"That," said Matt. "Is Shade. He's our hunter, our fire-starter, and our flier. And he's a Night Fury."

"Nightâ€¦ Night Fury?" she asked. "Isn't that a type of dragonâ€¦?"

"Yep," said Brian.

"You're having the exact same reaction I did," said Joey.

"That's not possible," said Alena.

"That's what everyone says," said Matt. "And they're always wrong."

Shade entered the house (Ben shutting the door behind him) and looked at Alena and Samantha, then back to Matt questioningly.

"Shade, Alena," said Matt. "Alena, Shade."

Shade dipped his head in greeting, and sat down on his hind legs.

"So, are we going to do anything about her?" asked Brian, gesturing to Samantha.

"I don't see what we can do," Trent replied. "She's fine there."

Several minutes later, they were all in a circle on the floor talking with each other- with the exception of Samantha, who was still unconscious. The dark beats of Van Halen's "Ain't Talkin 'Bout Love" filled the room.

Earlier, Matt had taken Shade out of the room and explained to him who Samantha was. Or, who they _thought _she was.

"If we're right about this," said Matt. "She'll be very, _very_ interested in you when she wakes up, because if we're right, she's a _huge_ fan of dragons. _Especially _Night Furies like you. Just giving you a head's up."

Needless to say, Shade had taken interest in Samantha after that.

Now, they were all talking and getting to know each other.

"So, what brings you two to New Hampshire?" asked Matt.

"I'm not really sureâ€¦" said Alena. "I had nowhere to go, and when I met up with Samantha, she was already on her way here. She said she felt like she had to come hereâ€¦ She said she knew that somewhere in New Hampshire was someone- or some_thing_ that could help explain her past to her. She said she didn't know how she knew, she just did."

"What do you mean, help explain her past?" asked Joey.

"Wellâ€¦" Alena was about to explain, but broke off as Samantha began stirring next to her.

She moaned, and sat up, rubbing her eyes. "My Godâ€¦" she said. "I just had the weirdest dream. There were a bunch of survivors, and

they had a Night Fury" she opened her eyes, and immediately looked around at the group staring at her. "Was it a dream?" she asked.

Then, she saw Shade, who was standing right next to her.

She jumped, startled at first, but then calmed down. "It wasn't a dream, was it?" she asked.

"Nope," said Matt.

Shade looked at her curiously.

"This" she trailed off, reaching out her hand to Shade. "This is amazing." Her hand was almost to Shade's head, and she hesitated.

Shade dipped his head and pressed it against her hand. To him, this was a sign of friendship.

Samantha gasped. "This might be the greatest day of my life. That I can remember, anyway."

"What do you mean?" asked Joey.

She sighed. "I have amnesia."

A chill ran up Matt's spine. "What?" he asked.

"I have amnesia," she repeated. "I woke up one day, sometime after Z-Day, and I couldn't remember anything other than my name. I have no idea who I was, what I've done, where I came from, or anything. And I wasn't able to find any records of myself anywhere." She paused for a moment. "It's almost like I didn't even exist."

Matt glanced at Ben, Joey and Brian, making eye contact with each of them. She could be lying, but Matt didn't think she was. He had an unexplainable, overpowering knowledge that she was telling the truth. He knew. And from those glances, he knew Ben, Joey and Brian knew as well.

She was exactly who they thought she was.

* * *

><p>Anyway, that's it for this week! I'll try as hard as I can to get Chapter Eighteen done by next Sunday. In the meantime, let me know what you think of this chapter, and the story so far! Until next time!

19. Chapter Eighteen: Prey

So, here's the next chapter!

I don't really have much else to say this time except that I hope you guys like it!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD.

* * *

><p>Chapter Eighteen:

****Prey****

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

For the rest of the day, the group got to know the new girls better. Samantha took particular interest in Shade.

"I love dragons," she said to Matt. "That's one of the only things I can remember. I've always had a thing for dragons." She paused, and then added, "Especially Night Furies. I found a generator and a copy of How to Train Your Dragon once, and I watched it, and something justâ€¦ clicked in my head."

They started talking, and she bombarded him with questions about Shade. "How did you meet him?" Samantha asked. Matt told her the story, and she listened with undivided attention. "After that, we sort ofâ€¦ Connected. It was just the two of us for a week, and I spent all of my time taking care of him."

"How is it possible?"

"I don't know," Matt lied. He would tell her, but not yet. He needed to be absolutely sure.

"Do youâ€¦ you knowâ€¦ fly on him?" she asked.

"Yes," said Matt. "Why, would you like to?"

Her eyes widened in excitement. "More than anything," she replied. "Can I?"

"I don't know," he said, glancing at Shade. "Can she?"

Shade grinned, and nodded.

"Tomorrow," he said. "Tomorrow, you are going to fly a living, breathing dragon."

"Oh my Godâ€¦" she said, barely able to contain her excitement. "This is like a dream come true."

Matt grinned. "I know the feeling."

The rest of the afternoon went similarly. For the first time in days, Matt felt like everything was okay.

The feeling was not mutual, however. Trent seemed happy, but underneath his mask was a sea of rage.

Something had been taken from him. And he was going to get it back.

"Tomorrow," he said to himself.

"What?" asked Lucas.

"Tomorrow," he repeated. "I'm going after that fucker. And I'm going to give him a piece of my mind."

"Count me in," Lucas offered. "He attacked me too. I'd love nothing more than to watch him lose."

Trent grinned. "Alright then," he said.

That night, the sleeping arrangements changed. Previously, the three bedrooms had been occupied by Matt and Shade, Ben and Trent, and Joey and Brian respectively. Lucas had slept on the couch. Now, Ben and Trent, out of courtesy, had allowed Alena and Samantha to take their place. They slept on other couches downstairs.

Matt and Shade woke up earlier than most of the others that morning. Shade woke up at around seven o'clock in intense pain- although not as intense as the previous morning- and had woken up Matt to get some painkillers.

"Okay," said Matt. "I need to ask you that question again, though. On a scale of one to twenty, how much does it hurt?"

Shade thought about that. It hurt a lot, but it wasn't as bad as yesterday. He extended his claw and carved a 16 in the floor.

"Okay," said Matt. He pulled out the bottle, shook out three pills, and held them out to Shade. The dragon lapped them up with his rough, forked tongue.

"Okay," said Matt, wiping the dragon slobber off of his hands onto the bed sheets. "Let's go downstairs."

They went downstairs, Shade going slowly and carefully, and Matt helping to support him. As they entered the living room, they found that Lucas, Trent and Ben were all fast asleep. They made their way into the kitchen, which had a counter and a table, with chairs at both, as well as all of your typical kitchen appliances. There they found Samantha sitting at the counter fiddling with some sort of cannon, listening to music on her iPod.

"Sleep well?" he asked quietly.

She didn't respond. She seemed deeply absorbed in her work, or her music. Or both.

Matt sat down next to her, and Shade laid down on his belly. "Hey," he said.

She jumped, grabbing her cannon, but relaxed when she saw that it was just him. She paused her music and took a deep breath. "Don't sneak up on me like that," she said, breathing heavily.

"Sorry," he replied.

"It's alright."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yeah," she replied. "You?"

"For the most part."

She looked down at Shade, who was lying on the floor, breathing heavily, his eyes clenched shut. "Is he okay?" she asked in concern.

"No," Matt replied. "But he'll be fine in a half hour or so. I just gave him some painkillers."

"What happened to them?" she asked.

"Okay— This is going to sound crazy, but—" Matt explained to her what happened to him. He told her all about Aperture in the process, and their run-in with GLaDOS. She listened, with an increasingly incredulous look on her face.

When he finished, she appeared to be considering what she had just heard. "That is the most unlikely story I've heard in my life. Well, as long as I can remember, that is."

"I know how it sounds, but I'm telling the truth," said Matt.

"Let me finish," Samantha requested. "It's very unlikely. But in light of recent events—" she glanced at Shade as she said this— "I feel that it might be more possible than it seems. Tell me, do you still have this portal gun?"

"Ben has it somewhere," Matt replied. "I gave it to him to see if he could make it work without being attached to someone's spinal cord."

"Ahh," she said. "Maybe I could help."

"Help with what?" said a new voice.

Matt turned, and saw Ben standing sleepily in the doorway. "Oh, hey," he said. "Sleep well?"

"I guess," Ben replied. He walked over to them, yawning. As he walked by Shade, he asked, "How's he doing?"

"Better," Matt replied. "But the painkiller hasn't set in just yet."

"I can see that," Ben observed. He sat down on the other side of Samantha. "What can you help with?" he repeated.

"I heard about the portal gun you supposedly have," she replied. "I was saying I could help you fix that up."

"Oh really?" Ben asked. "What makes you say that?"

"This." Samantha picked up the cannon device on the counter, and showed it to Ben. "I made this entirely by myself. Out of gun parts, audio devices, and other stuff I found lying around."

"What does it do?" Matt asked.

"I'll show you," she replied. She held the gun, aimed through the

doorway at Lucas's couch, and pulled the trigger.

A powerful wave of some sort flew from the cannon and hit the couch. It knocked it against the wall, and sent the man rolling off of it. "Sweet mother of shit!" he yelled in shock as he was woken violently.

Samantha exploded into laughter. Next to her, Matt and Ben gaped in astonishment.

"What the fuck was that?" asked Ben in awe.

"Sound waves," Samantha replied.

"â€¦ So let me show you that portal gun," said Ben.

"Okay," Samantha replied, laughing. She got up and followed him out of the room.

Later that day, at around noon, Trent and Lucas went out to attempt to track down the man who had attacked them. They were by the intersection with the road Brian had been bitten on, and they had just found a clue.

"Look at these," said Lucas, pointing. "These skid marks, all over the road. I don't remember these being here a couple days ago."

"Noâ€¦ Me neither," said Trent.

"Whoever left these is a very bad driver," Lucas observed. "Andâ€¦ Look, there are two sets. They were driving two cars."

"Seems like they were heading that way," Trent pointed down the street. "Do you know where that leads?"

"No," said Lucas. "But I bet some of the others would."

They returned to the house and announced where they were going.

"We're going to look for him down there," Trent announced. "Onlyâ€¦ we're not sure where that leads."

"That leads to Stevensonville, and then Lyndrich," Ben replied.

"I'll go with you," Matt offered. "Lyndrich's my home. I know my way around it, if you end up having to go there."

"Oh no you don't," said Samantha. "You told me I could ride Shade."

"Yeah, butâ€¦" Matt looked at her, helpless. "Fine," he said. "I'll check out Lyndrich another time."

"I'll go, in that case," Ben offered. "I lived in Lyndrich too."

"No," said Trent. "This is our fight. I don't want to get anyone else

involved. It's too dangerous."

"But-

"No buts. You're staying here."

Trent and Lucas left, taking a lot of guns- including Lucas's minigun- with them. Hours passed, and they didn't return.

At one point, Alena and Samantha had a moment alone.

"What do you think about these people?" Samantha asked.

Alena hesitated, considering the question. "They're okay, I guess," she replied. "I don't knowâ€¦ You know me, I don't really trust people."

"Yeah," said Samantha. "I can't believe they have a dragon with them."

"Trust me, you're not the only one who thinks that."

The time she didn't spent hanging out with Shade Samantha spent tinkering with the portal gun. She had dismantled one of Ben's guns for parts, and had removed the trigger to use on it. However, after some examination, she realized she needed two, so she stole one of the guns from the bag Trent and Lucas had found the day before. When Ben found out, he wasn't very happy, but she had convinced him it was necessary if he wanted to get it working.

Later on, Matt decided to fulfill his and Shade's promise to let her ride him. He approached her as she was working, and asked her if she wanted to go outside for a moment. Shade was already waiting for them out there.

"Sure," she replied. She tried- successfully- to act cool, but she knew what he wanted- and felt like she was about to explode with excitement.

They went outside, and saw Shade sitting on the lawn waiting for them. "We made a promise," he said. "Well, kind of. But we intend to keep it."

Samantha looked like she was going to pass out with excitement. "Oh my Godâ€¦" she said. "I'm going to ride a dragon. An actual _dragon_."

"Now you know how I feel. Every day. Now, let me show you how to do it." He led her over to Shade, who laid down and allowed her to climb onto his back. "Now, I don't have a saddle or anything, so you're going to have to ride bareback. Is that okay?"

He saw a flicker of anxiety pass through her face, but it was gone almost as soon as it came. "Yeah," she said. "If you can do it, I can."

"That's the spirit," he said, grinning. "Now, you're going to want to hug his neck as tightly as you can without choking him so you don't fall off. And wrap your legs around him as much as possible. Also, try not to put too much pressure on his right shoulder."

She did as he directed, and when Matt was satisfied, he gave Shade a pat on the head and said, "Have fun!"

"Wait, wha- Ah!" she screamed, as Shade took off running, taking her completely by surprise. When he had gained enough speed, he jumped into the air, flapping his wings a few times. Finally, he was up.

He flew almost straight up, trying to get as much altitude as possible. Samantha clung onto his neck for dear life. She was terrified, but at the same time she was having more fun than she'd ever had before in her life.

When he was high enough, Shade pulled up suddenly, changing his flight pattern to straight. Samantha held on even tighter; the force of the sudden change had almost ripped her off. But she held on.

Now he was flying smoothly. Samantha glanced around, and saw one of the most amazing and peaceful sights she'd ever seen. They were drifting among the clouds. The trees and buildings below seemed so small, and all the problems in the world below seemed to disappear to her, for just that moment.

"This is the most incredible thing I've ever experienced," she said to Shade. "You're amazing."

Shade risked a quick glance back and grinned at her.

They flew in peace for a few more minutes, and then he decided that it was time to land. He turned and flew back to the house, and then dived.

Samantha screamed, as he had taken her by surprise. She held on tighter than ever before.

When Shade was about halfway down, he started to get cocky. He pulled up and flipped over, flying upside down.

"Oh my God!" Samantha screamed. Shade only did this for a few seconds, before flipping back over and executing a perfect loop.

Samantha was scared shitless. But even now, she was still having fun. However, her weight was starting to irritate his wound. It was time to land.

He flew back to the house and dived again. When he reached the ground, he pulled up and landed perfectly next to where Matt was waiting.

Matt laughed, clapping his hands as Samantha slid off of the dragon's back, looking dizzy and dazed. She attempted to walk a few steps, but stumbled. Shade moved quickly and caught her.

"Oh my God," she said, panting. "Oh my God."

"How was it?" he asked, laughing.

"That was the most fun I've ever had in my life," she replied between breaths. "And despite my amnesia, I can still guarantee

that."

"Nothing, I repeat, _nothing _is more fun than flying on a dragon," said Matt.

"No. Definitely not."

That night, they made a fire and were circled around it. Trent and Lucas still hadn't returned, and a feeling of worry was starting to spread through the group.

"We should go after them," said Brian. "Something's obviously happened."

"Yeah," Joey agreed. "They're in trouble. I can feel it."

"I wish we could," said Ben. "But there's nothing we can do at night. Besides, they might have just gotten lost."

"I'm sure they'll be fine," said Matt. "If there's anyone who can take care of himself, it's Lucas. And Trent's pretty tough too. Besides, did you see how many guns they had?" Still, he wasn't entirely convinced. But Ben was right; there was nothing they could do at night.

"My thoughts exactly," said Ben. "And if they are in trouble, wellâ€¦ I have my EOD radio. I can send out a broadcast asking people to watch for them, and help if possible."

"EOD radio?" asked Alena.

"He has a radio station," Joey explained.

"Oh my Godâ€¦ So _that's _why your name sounded familiar!" Alena exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked Ben.

"We heard your radio station a couple days ago," said Alena. "I had forgotten your name, but I remember it now."

"Oh," said Ben. "Did you like it?"

"Yeah, it was alright."

"Bitch." Ben muttered.

"So, how did you two meet up, anyway?" asked Brian, changing the subject.

"Well, we met up about two months after America fell," said Alena.

"It was about one month after I woke up with amnesia," Samantha added.

"Anyway, I got cornered by a particularly nasty horde," Alena explained. "Stupid mistake on my part. She found me and helped me out. We agreed to stay together after that; even though we haven't always seen eye-to-eye on things, we both need someone in case we do

something stupid like that."

"That's the exact same reason me and Shade stayed together," said Matt.

"And me and Brian," Joey added.

"I just stayed with Trent because he's awesome," said Ben. "And we both wanted to get rid of the zombies."

"Wait, what?" asked Alena.

They explained Trent's search for a way to wipe out the zombies to the girls. By the time they were done, they were speechless.

"You people don't cease to amaze, do you?" asked Samantha.

"That's what was in the flash drive that man stole," said Ben.
"That's what they were going to get back."

Suddenly, he stood up. "Well, anyway, I think I'm going to go put on some music." He went and got his laptop and brought it out, and started playing an album by Still We're Forgotten.

"This is- well, was- Trent's band," Matt pointed out.

"Really?" asked Alena.

"Yeah," Ben replied. "He was the singer. They were my favorite band."

"What were they called?"

"Still We're Forgotten."

"Really?" Alena asked, surprised. "I've heard of them."

"Yeah," said Ben. "When I met up with him, it was like a dream come true."

For a while, they talked a bit more. Then, one by one, they all went to bed. Trent and Lucas still hadn't come back.

The next morning, Trent and Lucas were still gone.

After Matt gave Shade his medicine (The pain level had dropped to 14, so he only gave him two pills), they went downstairs to find Joey, Ben, Brian, and Alena loading up their guns. To the side, Samantha brandished her cannon.

"What's going on?" Matt asked.

"We're going after them," Ben replied. Matt didn't have to ask who.

"Okay," said Matt. "We're coming with you."

"What about his shoulder?"

"Wellâ€¦ Shade, do you think you're up for it?"

Shade nodded. It hurt, but not bad enough that he couldn't suck it up to help find his friend.

"He's fine," said Matt.

"Okay," said Ben. "Load up."

When they were all ready, they went to the place where Trent and Lucas had found the skid marks. "This must be what they found yesterday," said Alena.

"They said they were heading towards Lyndrich," Brian recalled.

"Yeahâ€|" said Ben. "Is anyone here good at tracking?"

"I am," said Alena. "My dad used to take me hunting. Beforeâ€|" All this."

They set off down the road in a group. All of them were on the lookout for signs that Trent and Lucas had been present. They walked in silence for a few minutes, before Brian finally broke the silence.

"Well, at least it feels good to finally get out and do something again."

"Yeah," said Joey. "You really had us going before."

"Guys, I know you might not like awkward silences, but there was a reason for that one," said Alena.

"What would that be?" asked Joey.

"I'm trying to concentrate."

They walked in silence for a little while longer, when suddenly Alena stopped short, gasping.

"What?" asked Ben, but then he saw it too.

They had come down Brown Hill Road, following more skid marks left by whatever vehicle had made the ones that Trent and Lucas had found. This had taken them into the town of Stevensonville briefly, before coming to an intersection at the border of Lyndrich.

In the middle of the intersection were several puddles of dried blood.

"My Godâ€|" said Samantha.

"Is thatâ€|" _their _blood?" asked Brian.

"I don't know," said Alena. "But I want to examine it. It's the only lead we have."

They waited as she bent down and examined the blood. As she was looking around, she noticed something else. "Here," she said, pointing to a spot off to the side. It hadn't snowed in a couple

weeks, and the weather had been warm, so most of the snow had melted in what promised to be one of New Hampshire's weirder winters. Because of this, they were able to see the ground beneath, and what was there. "There's a trail of blood in that direction." She pointed her finger in what Matt recognized as the direction of Gunnerville.

"Do you know if it's them?" asked Ben.

"No," she said. "But if it isn't, they could be anywhere. It would take days to find them, assuming they wouldn't be dead or gone before we could. This is our only lead. I suggest we follow it."

"I'm in," said Matt.

"Me too," Joey, Ben and Brian all said at once. Shade nodded in agreement.

Samantha shrugged. "I guess that means I'm coming too."

They followed the trail of blood into the woods, straight towards Gunnerville. A few minutes later, Samantha approached Matt. "Hey," she said quietly. "I need to talk to you. Walk behind everyone else for a moment."

Matt and Shade slowed down, and let the others pass. When they were all about fifteen feet ahead, they started talking.

"What's up?" he asked.

She came right out with it. "Look, I can't hold back any longer. I need to know what you know about me."

Matt was startled. "I don't know what-"

"Save your breath. Every time I introduce myself to a new member of your group, they give me this look. Like they knew me, but were surprised to see me. I know you know something, and I want to know what."

Matt took a deep breath, wondering what to say. He decided to be honest with her. "I might know something," he said. "But I need to ask you some questions first. Do you remember anything- anything at all- from before your amnesia?"

Samantha thought hard for a moment. "Iâ€| Yes. Kind of."

"What?"

"My name, first of all. I woke up, wondering who I was, and that was the first thing that came to me." She paused to think. "In terms of memories? Not much. A bunch of jumbled images in my head that don't make any sense." She paused, thinking. "There was something about lightning."

Matt's eyes widened in shock.

"There it is again!" she exclaimed. "You know something."

"What do you remember about lightning?" he demanded.

"I'm not a hundred percent sureâ€¦ Bright flashes. Loud booms," she listed. "Fear. All I really know is that every time there's a thunderstormâ€¦ Those memories come back, and I get nervous. _Very_ nervous."

Matt nodded. "Anything else? Any words or names that stick out, or any objects?"

She nodded. "There are some names that stand out to meâ€¦ I have no idea why, but they just stand out. Three of them more than others. Jack, Lilly, and Elizabeth.

"Also, this probably isn't that important, but I was scavenging in a Wal-Mart one day, and I strayed into the video games section. I saw a copy of the game _PokÃ©mon: Black Version_ and just feltâ€¦ _drawn_ to it. Eventually, I took a copy of one, along with a 3DS, and started playing itâ€¦ It was like I knew exactly what to do, even though I don't remember ever playing it. Also, I looked through one of those PokÃ©dex book things, and certain ones justâ€¦ stood out to me. I took one look at them, and instantly loved them."

Matt took a deep breath. "Was one of them Swampert?" he asked.

"Yeahâ€¦ That's the one that stood out the most." She looked at him. "Do you play?"

"I did. Before all this zombie stuff. But anyway, I think I might have an explanation. It might just be coincidence, butâ€¦ I think it's too big for that." He looked her in the eye. "It might come as a shock to you. Are you sure you want to hear this?"

She nodded. "I've been looking for this for as long as I can remember."

Matt sighed. "This will most likely just raise more questions for you. I can't tell you everything you're looking for. I don't know where you came from, or what your life was like before this, butâ€¦ There is something. Something big."

"Anything that you can tell me, I want to hear."

He took a deep breath, trying to think of how to explain it. "About three years ago-"

He was cut off as a sharp pain exploded in the back of his head. He fell to the ground, and landed face first. His head rolled slightly, and the last thing he saw before he blacked out was Samantha and Shade's worried, frightened faces turning to looks of horror.

"No!" Samantha screamed.

Ben whirled around to see what was wrong. Around him, all the others were doing the same. They saw several men dressed in bullet-proof vests and gas masks run out of the woods carrying automatics. The one in the lead had bashed Matt on the head with the butt of his gun, causing him to fall to the ground.

They kept coming. Samantha was too close to them, and she was temporarily immobilized in surprise. This hesitation was enough for them to get to her, and they bashed her in the head as well. She fell to the ground like a rock.

Next to her, Shade growled ferociously, and slashed out with his claws. They cut through the man's throat, and he fell to the ground, blood pouring. He was a goner, and Shade turned to the next man. Before he had the chance, however, the man pulled out a gun and shot him right between the eyes.

Shade stumbled back a bit, and then raised his claws to strike the man, but his strength was fading. Before he could attack, it was all gone, and he collapsed onto the ground.

It was then that Ben realized it was all or nothing. Joey must have realized the same, because he ran forward, aiming. He shot a few rounds, but they hit the men's bulletproof vests. Before he got a chance to shoot any more, they reached him and clubbed him to the ground.

Behind them, more men rushed out as well, and Ben realized they had walked into a trap. "Stay still," he said to the others. "Go willingly. Maybe they won't hurt us as badly."

The others didn't object. They may not have been geniuses, but it didn't take Einstein to figure out that their situation was a hopeless one.

The men surrounded and pointed their guns at them. "Drop your weapons!" a voice commanded.

Ben dropped his automatic on the ground. Next to him, Brian and Alena did the same. They held their hands over their heads.

"On your knees!" the voice commanded. Ben dropped onto his knees, and Brian and Alena did the same.

"You know it's impolite to hit girls, right?" asked Ben

"Don't move, and shut up!" the man commanded. Three men stepped up to them, like predators claiming their prey. Next to him, two of the men bashed Brian and Alena in the head with their guns, and they dropped to the ground.

He only had a half a second to think before they did the same to him. There was a second of flaring pain, and then everything went black.

20. Chapter Nineteen: Captivity

****So, here's the next chapter!****

****Before I talk about this chapter, I'd just like to point out that in between now and the next chapter, I'll be seeing HTTYD2. The fact that I'm finally able to say this is satisfying beyond words.****

****Anyway, just a word of warning, this chapter contains a very disturbing interrogation scene. If you have triggers towards violence or if you don't do well around it, you may want to skip that scene, which is marked.****

****Anyway, enjoy the chapter!**
>

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Nineteen:

****Captivity****

****Location Unknown****

Ben awoke in complete darkness.

The first thing he felt was an aching throb on the side of his head. The second thing was the handcuffs that bound his hands behind his back, the ropes that tied his feet together, and the duct tape that held his mouth shut.

_Where am I? _was his first thought. He noticed a humming noise, as well as a bumping motion beneath him. _Oh, _he thought. _I'm in a car. Probably a white, windowless van._

That would explain the darkness.

As his eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw a leg right in front of his face. Following it along with his eyes, he saw that it was Joey, in the same situation as him.

He strained to lift his head up, and saw that everyone else but Shade was there as well.

Well, unless this is us being transported to Hell, I don't think we're dead.

Not all of them, at least. He felt a pang of grief as he remembered that Shade had been shot. _Nobody survives a shot like that. Not even a dragon._

But then he remembered something else: there had been no blood.

He decided that the dragon must've been tranquilized. It was the only explanation for the lack of blood, and it also explained why he hadn't gone down immediately.

As he looked around, however, he realized that he wasn't there. _Either they left him- which would be an awful mistake on their part, assuming the zombies don't get him- or he's in another car._

That made him think more about his situation. They were bound and gagged, in the back of what appeared to be some sort of vehicle, on the way to where?

Suddenly, the supposed vehicle slowed down. He could feel- and hear-

the deceleration. When it came to a complete stop, he heard doors open and slam a few seconds later. This confirmed his suspicions that they were in a car.

There were voices outside, but he couldn't quite make them out. The only thing he knew was that they were getting closer.

Then a door opened, and he was nearly blinded by the light that poured in. "Take them out," a voice commanded.

A man dressed the same way as the ones who attacked them- he may have been one of the ones who attacked them- grabbed Ben's legs and roughly dragged him out of the car. Ben grunted in pain as his upper body fell from the trunk, smacked into the cement ground, and was dragged along it. Behind him, other men were doing the same to everyone else.

The man dropped his legs, grabbed his shirt, pulled him upright, and then held his automatic to his head. "Don't move, or I'll blow yer brains out," he threatened.

They were being lined up in front of what Ben recognized as the Gunnerville Town Hall. The roof of it was covered in solar panels, and many wires attached to them and led away (or, in some cases, into the Hall). In front of them was another man, dressed the same way except without a gas mask. He was tall and muscular- slightly more muscular than the rest, in fact- and Latino. He had a short, black beard and mustache, short, black hair, and green eyes. Ben guessed that he was the one in charge.

When they were all lined up, the man commanded, "Which one is in charge?"

The man pointing a gun at Ben's head said, "Sir. I heard this one give an order. I'm guessing he's a leader."

"Then remove his gag."

The man ripped off the duct tape, and Ben gasped in pain as it tore at his skin. The pain was short-lived, however, and very mild compared to other things he had previously experienced.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" he asked, furious.

The leader nodded at the man holding the gun to his head, and Ben felt a strong blow to the side of his face. His head swung to the side, and he had to keep from yelling. "You wanna be careful what you say to me," he advised.

"Assfuck," Ben said under his breath.

"What'd you say to me?" he demanded harshly. With that one comment, his mood had changed from calm to furious.

Ben didn't respond. In a rage, the Latino man walked up to him and bent over, staring him in the eyes. Ben could see the rage in him, almost overflowing.

"From now on, if you know what's good for you, you'll speak only when spoken too. And never talk to me like that." He turned to walk

back, but at the last second he whirled around and brought his fist right into Ben's jaw.

His head swung to the side again, and a fresh explosion of pain bloomed on his jaw. The leader turned around and walked back to where he was standing before.

"Now if you don't want to feel more pain than you've ever experienced in your life, you'll cooperate with me. Sound fair?"

Ben didn't say anything. But he felt the eyes of his friends fixed on him.

"For your sake, I hope that's a yes."

"Why did you do this?" Ben asked.

"I'm the one asking the questions here," he said.

"Fine then. But at least tell me what you did to Shade."

"Shadeâ€¦ Shadeâ€¦" The man frowned. "I don't know the nameâ€¦" Then, his eyes widened in understanding. "Ohhhhh," he said. "You mean your pet, don't you?"

"What did you do to him?"

"Don't worry. He's still alive. For now."

"What do you mean, 'for now'?"

"Well, he killed one of my men. He has to be punished."

Next to him, he saw Matt try to move forward, obviously in a rage, but he was restrained by one of the men, who Ben had guessed to be soldiers.

The leader- Ben had now taken to thinking of him as Mr. Jackwagon- ignored this, and continued talking. "Are you in league with the Man in Black?"

Ben frowned. "I don't know who you're talking about."

"Don't play dumb with me. You know perfectly well who I'm talking about. I know you're in league with him so you might as well just admit it."

Ben thought for a moment. "I think we're both fighting against the same guy."

Mr. Jackwagon laughed. "So you're trying to save your own skin, huh?" he grinned. "Well, I might be able to help you with that. Tell me what you know, and we might be able to work something out."

"I don't know anything."

Mr. Jackwagon walked up to him. "Feigning ignorance, eh?" he asked. He pulled out his gun and pressed it against his forehead. "If you don't talk, I'll shoot you right now. Don't think I won't; I have other people I can go to for questions."

Ben stared at him, his heart pounding in fear. But he didn't let it show. "Go ahead. Shoot me," he said. "You're going to anyway. Don't deny it."

Mr. Jackwagon held his gaze. For a second, Ben thought he was actually going to do it. But then he grinned and chuckled. "You got me," he said. He then walked over to the person next to him, which happened to be Alena. He held the gun up to her head, and looked back at Ben.

"Okay then. You don't care if you die. But what about your friend?"

Alena looked at him with pleading eyes.

"You've got to be joking," said Ben.

Mr. Jackwagon frowned. "What are you talking about."

"You just spared me because I said you were probably going to kill me anyway. Why would I think you'd spare my friends?" Ben stared him down as he said this. This might have proven to be their downfall in the end, but he had to say it to buy them time.

Mr. Jackwagon stared at him, his expression cold. Finally, he lowered his gun. "Take them to the prison," he ordered the soldiers. "I'll interrogate them each individually, and then we'll decide what to do with them."

The soldier next to him held him down and pressed the duct tape over his lips again. He then dragged him back to the van- which was, in fact, white- and threw him in the trunk. The other soldiers did the same with the rest of the group, and they slammed the door. Ben couldn't see a thing in the darkness, but heard muffled footsteps, and then heard a door slam. He heard- and felt- the engine ignite and the van start driving away.

For a while, there was nothing but silence. Ben couldn't see his friends that well, but he could almost feel their distress. It floated in the cramped air like a cloud.

Several minutes passed like this, and Ben began reflecting on what he knew. They were in Gunnerville. He recalled Brian and Joey saying that there was a gang that had control over Gunnerville. That solved the mystery of who was imprisoning them. But why?

He knew that too. Mr. Jackwagon- who was obviously their leader- thought they were in league with someone called 'The Man in Black.' But who was the Man in Black?

Ben thought he knew that too. Judging by Trent's description of the man who attacked him, he thought The Man in Black would be a suitable name.

That only left the question of what was going to happen to them. And how they would escape.

Again, he could guess at what would happen to them. Mr. Jackwagon had said they were going to be interrogated, and Ben knew that meant

torture. He knew these sorts of people; even if he and his friends _were_ innocent, only the most concrete evidence would clear their names. And whether they confessed or not, they would most likely be executed.

So that left one thing: how would they escape?

This, Ben did not know.

When the van finally stopped, he was jolted out of his thoughts. He heard the familiar sounds of doors opening and closing, muffled voices, and footsteps. Then the back door opened again and more soldiers- or where they the same?- were looking at them.

"Bring them in," one said. The soldiers dragged them out again- Ben grunted in pain as his body smacked the ground once more- and pulled them towards a building Ben recognized as the police department.

They entered the building and dragged the group to the holding cells. The soldier leading the group unlocked one of them and directed the others to bring some of them in. The soldier dragging Ben forced him in, flipped him over, and severed the ropes holding his legs together with a knife. He then unlocked the handcuffs, removed them, and allowed the other members of the group to come in.

Ben stood up, rubbing his aching head. The cell contained two bunk beds, a single toilet, and a sink. Then, he realized who was in the cell with him.

Trent and Lucas.

They said nothing, and just stared at him in shock. Matt was dragged in as well, and then the cell was shut and locked again. The soldiers opened the one next to them- which was separated by a solid wall- and brought Joey, Brian, Alena and Samantha in.

When the cells were both locked, the soldier in charge said, "Don't even think about trying anything. We have two guards outside, and two right over there." He pointed to the entrance to the room, where two guards were standing guard, then finished with, "We'll see you soon."

After they, left, Trent broke the silence.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"We were out looking for you," Ben explained.

"Why did you do that?" asked Trent. I _told _you to stay behind!"

That did it. Ben was pissed before, but that comment pushed him over the edge, into rage territory. "Almost twenty-four hours passed, and you didn't come back!" Ben was raising his voice now. "That's the second time that's happened in a week! And I don't remember _anyone_ electing you leader!"

"I am trying to protect you!" Trent had stood up, and was staring Ben down angrily. "This is _exactly _why I didn't want you guys to

come!"

Off to the side, Matt was talking quietly with Lucas.

"I feel like I should say something," he said.

Lucas shook his head. "Let them work it out. You'll just make it worse."

Ben stood up and stood inches away from him, looking up into the taller man's face. "You would have done so much better of a job 'protecting us' if you hadn't gotten yourself captured! Twice!" He was shouting now.

"Oh yeah?" Trent shouted back. "Well maybe I should've just let Brian die then! _Maybe I should've let all of you die!_"

He regretted that as soon as it came out of his mouth. He attempted to calm himself down, and said, "Listen, Ben, I'm so--"

"No, you listen!" Ben yelled. "I am sick and tired of you running off and leaving us alone! That one time when you got the cure, _that_ was okay! But this was just stupid, and I should've seen it! You're not the leader, Trent, _you're just part of the group!_"

Trent stared at him, his eyes filled with fury. He looked like he was about to say something, but then he just shoved Ben. Ben fell back a few steps, but then shoved Trent back. Before Lucas and Matt knew it, a fight had erupted between the two of them, as they punched, shoved, and grabbed at each other.

"We should do something," said Matt.

"No," Lucas replied. "Let them fight it out."

They kept slugging at each other, every once in a while scoring a blow. By this time, blood was streaming down from Ben's nose, and Trent had one hell of an ache in the back of his head. Matt couldn't stand it anymore; he had to do something. He stood up.

"Stop it," he said, but they didn't hear him. They were too busy hurting each other.

"STOP IT!" he yelled.

They stopped for a moment, and looked at him. Matt knew that he had their attention now, and if he didn't use it, they'd go right back to fighting, so he started talking.

"We _all _did stupid things today," he said. "But we can fight about it later. In case you didn't realize, we have bigger problems right now."

Ben and Trent looked at him, and then looked at each other. Finally, they backed off and sat down.

"I'm sorry," said Trent. "I sort ofâ€¦ lost it."

"Yeah," Ben agreed. "You did."

They sat in silence for a moment. The tension in the air was palpable. In an attempt to break it, Matt asked, "So how'd you two end up here?"

Lucas thought. "Well," he said. "We came across this intersection filled with dried blood-"

"That's what we found!" Matt exclaimed. "We thought it might have been from you, so we followed until we were ambushed."

Lucas nodded. "That's pretty much what happened to us."

Ben decided to pitch in, although he was still in a bad mood. "What have they been doing to you?"

Lucas shrugged. "Nothing, yet. They accused us of being in league with someone called 'The Man in Black,' and they say they're going to interrogate- which I assume means torture- us, but they haven't actually _done _anything other than put us in here in the first place."

"So they're going to torture us?" Matt asked, his face turning pale, and fierce anxiety spreading through him.

"Probably," Lucas replied. He saw Matt's face, and then added, "Cheer up! It'll make for a cool story."

That didn't help at all. To try and take his mind off of it, he called out to the occupants of the cell next to them. "Hey!" he yelled. "How're you doing over there?"

"How the fuck do you think?" Joey's voice responded. "We're locked in a cell by a bunch of maniacs, with nothing in the cell but beds and a toilet where everyone can watch if I have to shit!" A pause, then, "But other than that, we seem to be doing better than you!"

Matt chuckled. Lucas could have stopped at that, but being Lucas, he decided to take things too far.

"Well, you should be!" he yelled. "If any of us are getting love tonight, it's one of you!"

Matt sighed, and brought his hand to his forehead. "Shut up, Lucas," he said.

"Fuck you!" Alena this time. "You're such a perverted dick!"

"Well, I'd say all dicks are perverted!" Lucas yelled back.

"Lucas, shut the fuck up," Matt repeated.

"If I were in there, you would only have a few seconds left with yours!"

"Well it's a good thing you're not in here!"

She had nothing to say to that. Matt guessed she was probably seething right now. As he thought about it, he guessed that they all should be. They were being held captive, after all.

This made him think about Shade. A pang of worry shot through him, as he wondered if his dragon friend was okay- or even alive. And even if he was okay, he wouldn't be for much longer. He needed his medication.

Ben seemed to notice his worry. "You okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," Matt replied. "I'm just worrying about Shade." He looked Ben in the eye. "We have to get out of here."

Ben nodded. "I know."

In the other cell, they were having their own troubles.

Brian and Joey were talking to each other, and they seemed well enough. They were as mad as the rest of them about their current situation, but they didn't have any further problems with each other.

Alena was much more pissed than them. First of all, she was pissed most of the time anyway, but this situation- and Lucas's offensive comments had made her even more angry.

Samantha was angry as well. She had gotten _so close _to finding out something about who she was, and then just like that, the opportunity was taken away. Brian and Joey didn't notice this, and if Alena did, she ignored it. Neither of them really wanted to talk, anyway.

In her anger, she had forgotten one crucial detail; Joey knew something as well. And so did Brian. If she had remembered this, she might have gotten answers right then and there.

But alas, she was only human. And humans can forget. This was a fact she knew all too well.

Meanwhile, in a different part of town, Shade was beginning to recover from the attack.

He had been tranquilized, so he had been out longer than the others. Now, he was finally coming to. He opened his eyes and was immediately hit by a wave of fatigue, but pushed through it. It was nothing like what happened at Aperture. The dull ache in his shoulder was almost gone, but he knew it would come back eventually.

He forced himself to sit up and look around. He was in a cage in what looked like a warehouse somewhere. There were guards- dressed in the same uniform as the men who had attacked them- all around, and as he stirred, they immediately turned and aimed their guns at him.

Damnâ€¦ he thought. _How'd I get into this mess?_

Then he remembered. The blood trail, the attack; all of it. He felt a surge of panic as he realized that none of his friends were with him.

Please let them be okayâ€¦ he thought. The guards were starting to realize that he wasn't hostile- at least not _yet_- and turned back to what they were doing.

After the feeling of panic passed over, rage replaced it, and he had to restrain himself as hard as he could to not attack them through the cage bars.

There was no way of knowing if the others were still alive. And there was definitely no way of getting out of here. If he tried to attack them, they'd shoot him before he could kill all of them, and even if they didn't, his captors would only send more.

There was nothing to do except wait, so he laid back down, curled up with his tail wrapped around his face with the fin covering his eyes, and tried to go back to sleep.

The rest of the day went by uneventfully. The group in the prison spent the rest of the day talking to each other for comfort- and eating, when some guards brought them a meal of a single loaf of bread for each cell. Meanwhile, Shade slept most of the day- except for when a guard brought _him _some food (meat, this time), as well.

When night came, Ben was the last person awake. He was lying down on the rather-uncomfortable mattress on the bottom bunk, with no covers, thinking. Whatever was going to happen, it wouldn't happen that night. He knew that much.

In the background, he recognized the sound of electricity humming. He hadn't heard it at night in so long. He hadn't noticed it while he was talking with the others, but now that everything was silent, he did.

They have solar panels, he thought, remembering the Town Hall. _Whoever these people are, they're here to stay. Gunnerville is theirs now._

But hadn't Brian and Joey said that already?

Eventually, his thoughts faded as he drifted off to sleep. That night, he dreamtâ€|

****March 14****th****, 2014****

"Is the coast clear?" Ben asked.

The three of them were hiding behind a car in the school parking lot. Next to him was his friend Anthony. He was a tall Senior, with thick, shoulder-length black hair, green eyes, and light skin. He wore a black T-Shirt and black jeans that always seemed to be too low on him. He had the classic stoner appearance, which was just as well, because he was one.

The other boy, the one looking around the front of the car, was a junior. He was tall and skinny and had short, blond hair and green eyes. His name was Carl.

"Not yet," he said.

After the lockdown, the zombies had broken into Ben's classroom and had begun a massacre. Only about half the class made it out. In the hallway, he had met Anthony and they had taken a brief refuge in the Boy's Bathroom, where they met Carl and two other Juniors; Dave and

Mike. After a few minutes, they decided to make a run for it. Ben, Anthony and Carl had made it out. Dave and Mike weren't so lucky.

Now, they were trapped between two cars in the parking lot. If they moved, the zombies on both sides would see them. Since they had no weapons, they had no choice but to wait for the ones ahead of them to move, so that they would have a clear shot at their cars. Their plan was to get to them and drive to Ben's house, stopping at Carl's and Anthony's first, where they would lay low until things had calmed down.

Ben sighed, and then grabbed his cell phone and decided to try his girlfriend again. He was worried; she hadn't answered his calls, and he wanted to know if she was still alive or not. He dialed her number and hit Send.

Oh God, please let her pick up, he thought. _Please don't let her be dead._

After three rings, he was starting to lose hope. But she picked up on the fourth.

"Ben?" it was her. She was alive. He breathed out a sigh of relief. "Ben?" she repeated, sounding terrified. She also sounded like she was crying. "Are you okay?"

"Katie," Ben greeted. "I'm fine. What about you?"

"I'm okay. Iâ€¦ I'm just shaken upâ€¦" her voice broke. "Benâ€¦ I got out of the school a while ago and drove home, andâ€¦ My parentsâ€¦ They're dead."

A pang of regret shot through him. He had liked Katie parents. They were nice people, her dad especially. "I'm sorry," he said. "Listen, Katie, you need to get somewhere safe. Meet us at my house, okay?"

If he had known then the consequences this would have, he would have done everything in his power to keep her at home.

"Okay," said Katie. "Ben?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you."

"I love you too."

She hung up the phone, and Ben pressed the End button. He put the phone back in his pocket and turned back to Carl. "Can we go now?"

"I don't know," the Junior replied. He leaned out and looked towards the cars. "Yeah," he said. "It's all clear."

The three of them sprang out from behind the cars and took off running. Ben's eyes found his car, a used Mitsubishi Lancer, and sprinted toward it as fast as he could. Behind him, Anthony was sprinting towards his motorcycle, which was parked next to it.

Carl wasn't as fast as either of them, and he began falling behind. "Wait up!" he yelled. They were his last words.

A zombie jumped out at him from in between two parked cars. He didn't have any time to react before the zombie was on him, and digging its teeth into his throat. He screamed, and Ben and Anthony whirled around, but they knew as soon as they saw him that he was beyond help.

"HELP ME!" he begged, but Ben and Anthony kept running. They didn't look back, even when his screams stopped.

Ben took out his keys and unlocked the car as quickly as he could, then jumped into the passenger's seat. He looked out the window to verify that Anthony had successfully started his motorcycle, and then backed out of the parking space, flattening an unfortunate zombie with a sickening squelch as he did so.

He began to drive as fast as he could, not caring about the speed limit. He was doing at least forty-five in a thirty zone, but he felt such things didn't matter anymore. He took one quick look in the mirror to make sure Anthony was still behind him, and then sped up even more.

Since he was dreaming, and in real life the next several minutes had gone by uneventfully, time seemed to speed up. He was at the school one second, and almost at home the next. Those minutes were unimportant; what was important was what happened when he got to his neighborhood.

Throughout the drive, he had only glanced into his mirrors a few times. He was so intent on getting home as fast as possible that he no longer cared for safety. This was another mistake on his part.

When he finally pulled into his street- Highland Drive, Lyndrich- he quickly made the turn into Anthony's col-de-sac, Tartan Court. Highland Drive was very long and curvy, and Ben's house was all the way at the end. Before Z-Day, there had been many a day where he had had to walk all the way from the bus stop at the beginning of the road to his house. However, Anthony's street was extremely short and was within viewing distance of the turn-off.

He pulled over to the side of the road just in front of Anthony's house and waited. But something wasn't right, and it wasn't until he deactivated his car that he realized what.

Anthony's motorcycle wasn't there.

"Shit!" he cursed. He fumbled with the door, grabbed the handle and shoved it open. He stepped outside and looked around.

His friend was nowhere to be seen.

"Fuck!" he nearly screamed. "Anthony!" he yelled. No response. "Anthony!"

It was pointless; he knew. He hadn't so much as looked behind him once since they had left Harristown. It was a bad idea, but he hadn't

been thinking straight. He had been in a rush to get home to make sure Katie was okay.

"Anthony!" he yelled, one last time. A tear began to well up in his eye as the inevitable hit him: Anthony was almost certainly dead.

He held it back. _You can mourn him later_, he thought. _Right now, you have to get yourself and Katie to safety_.

He got back in the car, and just as he started the engine he saw Katie's car drive by behind him. She came from a rich family, so her car was a brand new Mazda 3. Needless to say, Ben loved it almost as much as he loved her.

He drove around the col-de-sac and turned back onto Highland Drive, following Katie. The street was littered with blood and bodies, and every once in a while he would see a zombie shambling around. Once he actually saw someone get bit.

Sadness welled up inside him. He knew all these people; had known them his entire life. And now they were all dead.

They finally reached his house, and he stopped in the middle of the road, no longer caring about where he parked. Ahead of him, Katie had pulled into his driveway, parked the car, and got out. Ben did the same, and locked the car by force of habit. Little did he know that of all the mistakes he had ever made, that might have been the biggest.

The two of them rushed to meet each other. Katie was tall and thin, with long, brown hair, clear blue eyes, and smooth, light, fair skin. That day, she had been wearing a pair of dark blue sweatpants and a Still We're Forgotten T-shirt (she _almost_ shared Ben's love of Still We're Forgotten). As Ben saw her running towards him, he realized once again that he loved her, and she was the most beautiful person in the world to him.

They met each other and embraced. Katie's hand found the back of Ben's head and pulled it forward, pressing her lips against his. There were many things they could've said, but nothing was necessary. All that could have been said was said in that kiss.

They made out briefly, before Ben broke it. "Come on," he said. "We need to get inside."

There was no car in the driveway. Ben had suspected as much. He let them in with the spare key he carried around with him, and they stepped inside.

"Hello?" Ben said.

No response.

"Okay," Ben whispered. "Let's check the house together."

Once again, the next hour or so went by in a flash. They checked the house and found nobody; not even Ben's dog, Teddy. There were no zombies. The only thing that they found was a note on the table from Ben's dad, saying that he had left to get help. Ben never saw him again. He never saw any of his family again. They might even have

been dead already by that time.

After they had scoped out the house and gathered some weapons together (mostly knives and baseball bats), Ben and Katie tried to call people. Ben started with his parents and family, and then moved on to his friends, but nobody answered.

After that hour or so, they made a decision. The front lawn was filling up with zombies, and they wouldn't be safe in the house for much longer. They decided to make a run for Ben's Lancer and get to somewhere else that was safe- preferably somewhere with more people.

As they stood next to the door, gathering their wits, and waiting for the right moment, Ben turned to Katie.

"I just want you to know, in case something happens, that I love you," he said.

"I love you too," she replied. "But nothing will happen. I won't let it."

That was one thing he liked about Katie. She was strong and brave.

Ben didn't say anything. Instead, he leaned over and kissed her passionately. He didn't break away as quickly this time, and it lasted much longer than the first one.

"Just in case," he said, when the kiss was finally broken.

She smirked. "Let's go," she said.

Ben opened the door and ran outside. There were zombies all over his lawn; about fifteen to twenty of them. They held the metal baseball bats they had collected and ran towards the car, bashing the heads of any zombie that got in the way.

When they reached the car, Ben ran around it to the driver's door. Katie attempted to open the passenger's door, but found it locked.

"Shit!" she cursed.

"Damn it!" Ben exclaimed, digging through his pocket for the keys. "That's a habit I might want to break."

He got his keys out, but in his hurry he lost his grip on them and they fell to the ground, clattering onto the pavement. He bent over to pick them up, and that's when it happened.

Katie, in her eagerness to leave, had momentarily neglected to keep an eye over her shoulder. The lapse of attention was short, but not short enough to prevent a zombie from sneaking up on her. Before she was able to recover, it grabbed her back and fastened its teeth into her throat.

She began screaming. Ben, who had just picked up the keys, dropped them immediately and looked up to see his girlfriend with a zombie biting her neck, and her blood pouring from her throat.

"NO!" he screamed. He ran around the car and swung his baseball bat as hard as he could. The zombie's skull cracked, and it fell backward. Katie slumped against the car, her hands going for her neck.

Ben kicked the zombie to the ground and brought the bat smashing down onto its skull. Its head cracked open, and blood and brains spilled out onto the pavement. Looking up, he saw more zombies almost upon them. Without hesitating, he picked up Katie, who was still alive- but only just- and carried her over to the driver's door. Bending over, he picked up the keys and unlocked the door, opening it almost immediately. He sat down in the driver's seat, shut the door, and laid her head against the window.

He put the keys in the ignition and floored it, driving away from the house as fast as he could. Katie's blood was still flowing, and his shirt was almost entirely stained red, as was hers. When he was halfway down the street- a distance he deemed as being safe from the zombies- he parked and looked down at Katie.

By this time, the truth was starting to hit him, and his eyes filled with tears. She looked at him weakly, and raised her hands.

"Don't move," he said, his voice quivering. He sniffed, and then said, "You'll be okay."

She shook her head slowly. "Benâ€¦" she gasped, choking on her own blood.

"Please," said Ben. A tear fell from his eye and landed on her shirt.

"Iâ€¦ love youâ€¦" she said. Her hand reached up to touch his face.

"I love you too," said Ben. He sniffed again, and his vision turned blurry. Tears were streaming down his face.

She looked him in the eyes one last time, her gaze full of regret.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have locked the car."

"It's notâ€¦ your fault," she choked. Then, her eyes glazed over, and her breathing stopped.

Ben sat there for a moment, unable to believe it. Finally, he broke down. He slammed his fist against the horn, screaming. "NO!" he yelled. "NO NO NO NO NO!"

His face was soaked with tears now, and he laid his head against the steering wheel and sobbed.

****Present Day****

Ben woke up, gasping.

That dream again, he thought. _Why is it always _that _dream?_

He had been trying to forget about it. The past was too painful to remember. When it came to haunt him, he would usually drink his sorrows away- temporarily at least.

About an hour after she had died, he had finally gotten the strength to keep driving. The first thing he did was drive to the Lyndrich cemetery and bury her. It was almost sunset by the time he was done, and he had had to put down a few zombies during the process. But he knew it had to be done.

Then, he had driven to her house, killed the couple of zombies that had gotten inside, locked himself in one of the bedrooms, and stayed there. But he didn't sleep.

The next morning, he took some of her father's clothes to replace the bloodstained ones he was wearing, and set off. He drove back around to his house, but nobody had come home yet. Later that day, he heard of the shelters, and found one.

That memory was the reason he drank so much. But now, he had nothing to drink it away with.

The truth was that he blamed himself for her death. If he hadn't locked the car, or if he hadn't dropped the keys, she would still be alive. There had been a few times were pondering this had even led him to consider suicide. But every time he did, he pushed the thought away. He had to live for the both of them now, and try and make up for what he had done.

He sat up on his bunk, breathing heavily for a little while. It was early, and everybody else was asleep. He didn't want to wake anybody up, so once he caught his breath, he laid back down. He stayed like that for a few hours, even after people had gotten up.

About halfway through the day, the soldiers- who Ben had taken to calling Asswipers- came back. They unlocked the cell without a word, and nobody inside said anything. They walked in and grabbed Ben's arms and began to drag him away.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded. But he already knew. The Asswipers said nothing.

They dragged him out of the room he was being kept in and through the station, eventually bringing him to what used to be a storage closet. Inside was a large, muscular African-American man dressed in the same Kevlar as the others, except without a gas mask. He was bald, but had a long, neatly trimmed beard. Ben decided to call him The Bearded Lady. Next to him was a chair with chains and handcuffs attached to it, and a wooden box. The room was lit by a single lightbulb dangling from the ceiling.

"Bring him in," said The Bearded Lady.

The Asswipers holding him forced him into the chair, and forced his wrists into the handcuffs. They snapped them shut, and wrapped the chains tightly around him.

When The Bearded Lady felt he was strapped in enough, he said, "Leave us. And lock the door."

The Asswipers did as they were told, and they were alone.

"So," said The Bearded Lady. "It's just the two of us."

Ben stared at him, his gaze filled with anger and hatred. But inside, he was holding back another emotion- dread.

****WARNING: THE FOLLOWING SCENE CONTAINS DISTURBING VIOLENCE. IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD BE READING THIS, SKIP AHEAD TO THE MARKER "END OF SCENE"****

"What's your name?"

Ben didn't say anything.

The Bearded Lady laughed. "So, you're a fighter, huh?" Suddenly, he stopped laughing, and grew deathly serious. "You might want to consider changing that." Without any warning, he smashed his fist into Ben's face. Ben yelled in a mixture of pain and surprise.

"What's your name?" The Bearded Lady repeated. He drew his fist back again, and asked one last time, "What's your name?!"

Ben cringed, but didn't say anything.

The Bearded Lady dropped his fist and chuckled. "You're a tough one, I'll give you that." He knelt down to the wooden box and opened it. "Your name's not important, so I'll let that go. Now, let's move on to the real questioning."

Ben tried to crane his head and see what was in the box, but couldn't. He heard the clinking of metal against metal as The Bearded Lady rummaged through it, and guessed that whatever was in it wasn't good.

"Your face looks a little too pretty today," The Bearded Lady remarked, as he produced brass knuckles. Looking at them, Ben's eye widened and fear spread through his body.

The Bearded Lady walked over next to him, and slid the brass knuckles onto his fingers. "Now," he said. "Are you ready to cooperate?"

Ben opened his mouth to respond. "Fuck you."

The Bearded Lady chuckled, and lashed out, punching him in the face..

He felt the metal smash into his face, and white hot agony flew up the side of his cheek. He screamed, knowing that it would do no good, but not being able to control it.

When he stopped screaming, he began breathing heavily. The Bearded Lady stood up, grinning wickedly at him. "Now," he said. "Are you ready to cooperate?"

Ben didn't say anything. The Bearded Lady gave him another wicked smile, and said, "I'm going to take your silence as a yes. Now, who is The Man in Black?"

Ben frowned. "I don't know," he gasped.

"Bullshit!" The Bearded Lady's voice suddenly filled with rage. "I know you know. You're part of his gang, and you'll admit it before you leave here. What were you doing in the woods near Gunnerville?"

"Weâ€¦ Aren'tâ€¦ Withâ€¦ Him!" Ben spat.

The Bearded Lady shook his head, and punched again. There was more pain, more screaming. Ben spat, and a bit of blood flew out.

"What were you doing?" The Bearded Lady repeated, close to yelling now.

"We were looking for our friends, that _you _captured, you little fuckwad!" Ben yelled.

The Bearded Lady punched him again. "That was for the insult," he said. "And why were your friends here?"

"They were looking for the Man in Black too!"

"Bullshit!" The Bearded Lady yelled. "I know you're in league with him!" The Bearded Lady repeated. "You can't lie to me! Why were they here?"

"I'm not lying! I swear!" Ben yelled.

"Bullshit!" There was another thump of metal on flesh, and another scream. Tears of agony were flowing down Ben's face now.

"Yes, you are lying!" The Bearded Lady was practically screaming now. Then, he appeared to calm down. "Let's go back to the beginning. I'm giving you a chance to make the pain go away. All you need to do is admit that you're on his side."

"No. I'm not."

The Bearded Lady's face contorted into one of rage. "Fucking idiot!" he yelled, punching him again.

Ben screamed, but beneath his scream, his mind was working. By now, he had no nails left on his hand, and all he wanted was for the pain to go away. Also, he knew he had to try to prevent this from happening to his friends.

****END OF SCENE****

"Please," said The Bearded Lady. "Do this for yourself."

Ben looked up at him, faking a pleading expression. "If I confess," he began, "Will you give me your word that you won't do this to my friends?"

The Bearded Lady smiled. "Yes," he said.

Ben sniffed, pretending to be broken. "Okay," he said. "I'll tell you anything."

The Bearded Lady grinned. "There you go," he said. He removed the brass knuckles from his hand, put them in his pocket, stood up, and looked at him. "Are you in league with the Man in Black?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. He never tells us his name, or shows his face."

"What were your friends doing here?"

"They were to scout out your borders, as stealthily as possible."

"Why? Was he planning some sort of attack?"

"Yes. At least, I think so. He doesn't really tell us the purpose of these things, only that they serve the cause we all fight for."

"And what is that?"

Ben thought, but only for a minute. He was excellent at improvisation. "A new world. One in which everyone is united against the zombies. He told us you were standing in the way of that cause."

The Bearded Lady chuckled. "He's lying."

"Are you done?" Ben asked.

"No. I still have a few more questions for you."

Ben sighed.

"Where- _exactly_- is his base?"

Ben thought back for a moment. Trent and Lucas had seen the tire marks heading into Lyndrich. He wasn't sure if that was where the Man in Black really lived, but it was his best guess.

"Somewhere in Lyndrich," he replied. "That's all I know. He has some others with him there, but I've never seen them. He always meets with us in Harristown, and he always comes alone."

"You're not lying to me, are you?" his voice became threatening.

Ben shook his head. "No. Not at all."

The Bearded Lady stared at him for a moment, then let out his breath. "Good," he said. "One last question. That's _thing _that was with you_ Is that the Beast?"

Ben frowned. "What?"

"The Beast. The thing that guards Lyndrich, that lurks around at night. The reason none of our patrols ever return if they go after dark. The Man in Black's _pet_."

Ben shook his head. "No," he said. "Shade's with us. He always has been. I didn't even know there was a beast."

The Bearded Lady stared at him again, eyes filled with distrust. "You better not be lying to me," he said. "If you are, I'll make you wish you'd never been born."

Then, he turned to the door, and yelled, "Take him away!"

The door opened, and two of the Asswipers came in. They unwrapped the chains, and released him from the handcuffs. Then, they dragged him to the door by his hands.

"Bring me the next one!" The Bearded Lady ordered.

"What?" Ben almost screamed in rage. "You gave me your word!"

"I know, and I'm sorry. But I needed to get you to talk. And I need to see if your friends' stories agree with yours."

"_You little piece of shit! When I get my hands on you-_"

"You'll never get the chance. We're going to keep you locked up until we get the information we need. Then, tomorrow, we'll execute you. Today is going to be your last full day on this planet, and you're going to spend it behind bars. Now, get him away from here."

"NO!" Ben screamed as the Asswipers dragged him away. "YOU CAN'T DO THIS!"

But The Bearded Lady just ignored him.

* * *

><p>So before I say goodbye for this week, I'll just say that as far as I can remember this is the last scene with violence quite that bad in it.

Anyway, I hope you liked that chapter. I'll see you guys again next week!

21. Chapter Twenty: On the Inside

Sorry this is late, guys. I was going to do this last night but I had a major anxiety attack. So I'm doing it now.

Anyway, How to Train Your Dragon 2 was an amazing movie that was at least as good as the first. I think I had more nitpicks about this one than the last but there was also more that I liked, so it evens out.

Anyway, this chapter mentions rape in it, just warning. Not in a good light; I think rape is horrible, but it's mentioned all the same. For those of you who are freaked out by that, I'll say that I'll never actually end up including a full-on rape scene in my story.

Anyway, here's chapter twenty.

* * *

<p>Chapter Twenty:

****On the Inside****

****Gunnerville, New Hampshire****

Alex Hansbury was on duty that day.

He had just finished his shift of guarding the town gate, when one of his superiors had approached him and asked him to take a shift guarding the prisoners. He was walking in the direction of the prison, having no idea who the prisoners were, only that it was his job to make sure they didn't escape.

Each shift took about two hours. Alex was still amazed that Axel Carlton, their self-proclaimed leader, had been able to keep enough people under his control that they were able to take shifts. He supposed he knew how, but it still amazed him that it had worked.

Carlton had moved in about two months after America had collapsed. With him was his large gang of thugs; about thirty of them at first. They claimed that they wanted to unite the survivors under one leadership, but Alex knew what they really wanted. They wanted power, and as leader, Carlton was supposed to give it to them.

They came and raided Gunnerville, forcing any survivors- including Alex- into one place as they took over. They assigned each person housing (Alex was lucky; they decided to let him keep his old one), and kept watch over them. They said they were doing it for their own good; once the takeover was complete, they would be safe from any and all zombies.

They built a wooden (yet very thick and sturdy) wall around the entire town, and set up the solar panels. Then, they forced everyone to "enlist" into their "private army." Carlton said it was because there was a price to pay for protection. Then, he started spreading to other areas. He had attempted to take over Lyndrich first, and had "recruited" most of the few survivors (in Carlton's case, that basically meant forcing them to be part of his army). He drove out the rest, except for a few that they weren't able to get to, because before they were able to, The Man in Black had arrived.

He came out of nowhere, and with a fury. Any patrols that were sent into Lyndrich were crushed. They had no idea how many people he had on his side- they had only seen one other, the woman in the yellow jacket- but they knew he had more. And there was something elseâ€¦|

At around the same time as him, something else appeared in Lyndrich. Something much worse. They called it the Beast, but in truth they didn't know what it was. All they knew was that it came out at night, and killed any one of their men that set foot past the border. Only one person ever made it back, and he said The Man in Black came to him after the attack, saying that he wouldn't spare anyone next time. The man was unable to provide a description of what had attacked him.

They only sent one more patrol after that, and it never came back.

With The Man in Black cutting off their trek into Lyndrich, and protecting the small group of survivors that remained, they were forced to move on. They set their sights on the town of Norbury. But, when they tried to take over them, they fought back. There were only a handful of them, but they were very creative with explosives. After that, Carlton only sent men in every now and then; he wanted to spend all of his resources taking out The Man in Black.

Between these two battles, and protecting Gunnerville, Carlton's army was spread thin. He was a very stubborn man, and refused to let the conflicts go, so he kept at them, ignoring all the other surrounding towns for the time being. At the same time, he had to deal with the "loyalties" of his own people. He kept them on his side using two things; bribery and fear.

Those who could be bribed- be it with power, special privileges, etc.- were. Those who weren't were controlled by persuasion and fear. Carlton would tell them they were safer here than anywhere else, and then threaten them if they were adamant about leaving. Anyone who attempted to escape was shot.

Alex wanted nothing more than to take down Carlton, or at the very least escape. He hated being a part of his army. But he didn't want to die, and he only knew one other person he was sure would help. To escape would require more than two people, and he was too afraid to ask anyone else. If even a whisper of it got back to Carlton, he would never see another day.

Alex walked over a patch of snow, one of the few remaining ones. As his feet crunched over the icy powder, the jail came into sight. He had made it there in great time; he was tall, and very fit. Opening the door, he approached the guards in front of the entrance to the cell room, and relieved one of them of her duty.

She nodded without a word, and left the building, as Alex took her position next to the door to the prisoners' hallway.

He hated the job already. For two hours, he wasn't allowed to do anything but stand there and keep watch. From somewhere else in the building he heard screams of pain. A man, from the sound of it.

_Price... _he thought. _That sadistic fucker is having fun, isn't he?_

Bill Price was one of Carlton's top dogs. He had been here ever since the beginning, and out of all of the big guys, he was by far the meanest. He liked causing people pain; got off on it. It was why Carlton had put him in charge of interrogation. He was good at it.

A few minutes later, the screaming stopped, and a few minutes after that, two guards came into the room. They were dragging a man in the middle. He was a tall white man with short black hair, and stubble for a beard. He was wearing a gray, unzipped sweatshirt with a white, bloodstained, sleeveless T-shirt beneath. His face was streaked with blood, and he was bleeding from the nose. The man was trying to resist, but the guards were too strong for him. "Fuck you!" he yelled

furiously. "Fuck you all!"

Alex watched as they dragged him through the door. He felt sympathy for him. But there was nothing he could do to help.

About a minute later, they were dragging another man out. This one looked about the same age as the other. He was tall and had short, light brown hair. His eyes were rather strange, as one was green and the other was blue. He looked nervous. Alex thought he looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't put his finger on how.

The guards took him away to Price. Alex mentally sent him his sympathies. Not that they'd do any good.

About a minute later, the screams started. Alex tried to block them out; torture bothered him. He failed.

When it was finally over, they brought him back in much the same state the other man was in. Except he wasn't fighting; he was just submitting. They disappeared through the door.

There was some pleading this time. Those ones were the worst; the ones that pleaded. They did the worst under Price's interrogations.

The door opened, and Alex glanced at the prisoner. Then, he did a double-take in shock.

He thought that he couldn't have seen who he did. It was almost impossible. But it was real.

It was Matt.

Alex was stunned. He almost lost his balance.

He had known Matt from Before; they had gone to school together. They had been friends since sixth grade. He had to stop himself from yelling Matt's name; no matter how much he wanted to help his friend, he couldn't. Not now, at least. It would only put him in jail as well.

But right then and there, he made up his mind to help the prisoners, at any cost. Whether they were with The Man in Black or not.

He reluctantly watched as Matt was brought away. A minute later, the screams started.

When he was finally off duty, he went to talk to Carlton. He was even more determined to help the prisoners get out, since he had seen two more people he recognized: Joey and Brian. And from what he heard, there were more he hadn't seen.

He found Carlton in the Town Hall, where he usually was while everyone else was doing the work for him. The only time he ever came out and did anything was when he was very dissatisfied with someone else. For instance, he had personally helmed a mission to take down The Man in Black a couple days before, after a patrol he had sent out spotted him. He claimed that he was sick and tired of everyone else failing, so he had decided to take things into his own hands.

He failed as well.

At the moment, he was talking with Price. The torturing was over, and he was reporting the information he had gathered.

"Sir!" Alex called, making sure to address Carlton properly. That was important. "Do you have a moment?"

Carlton looked at him, irritated. "Excuse me," he said to Price. Then, to Alex, he said, "Do I look like I have a fucking moment?"

"Noâ€|"

"Then wait your fucking turn."

Carlton was rude like that. Alex waited, and Carlton allowed Price to continue.

"They're all either unwilling to confess, or telling different stories," he concluded.

Carlton stroked his short beard in thought. "What do you think?" He finally asked.

"Sir?"

"Do you think they're guilty."

"I can't be certain. Either they're innocent, or they're very good at lying. It's your call."

Carlton continued stroking his beard and stared off into space, deep in thought. After a few moments, he looked back at Price and said, "That beast they haveâ€| It's The Man in Black's Beast. I'm sure of it, no matter what they say."

This both surprised and confused Alex. _So they really are with The Man in Blackâ€|_ he thought. _Butâ€| That doesn't really sound like something they'd doâ€| Besides, we all got scattered after Z-Dayâ€| I'll have to find this 'beast' of theirs and see for myself._

As he continued on this train of thought, he made a connection. _That must be what they're guarding in the warehouse_, he thought.

"They're on The Man in Black's side," Carlton continued with resolution. "I don't need any other evidence. The only reason I wanted them tortured was so that we might be able to get some information. Have them executed at noon tomorrow. Make it public."

"Okay," asked Price.

"But what if they are innocent?" Alex blurted out. He regretted the words as soon as they came out of his mouth.

Carlton stared at him menacingly, at where Alex's eyes were behind his gas mask. "They aren't," he said, and Alex realized just then that there was no arguing with him. "And even if they areâ€| I need

my people to feel like we're the winning side, even if we aren't. Understand?"

He knew that if he said anything other than yes, it would most likely be the last thing he ever said. Arguing with Carlton wasn't just futile; it was deadly. And it wouldn't help to talk to others about it. That would be even worse.

No, the only thing he could do to help his friends now was to take things into his own hands.

He nodded. "Yes, sir!"

Carlton smiled; a thin, deadly smile. "Good," he said. He turned back to Price. "You have your orders. Is that all?"

"Not quite, sir," said Price, who was smiling as well, currently enjoying this. _You sick, sadistic bastard_, Alex thought.

"What else is on your mind?" asked Carlton.

"Wellâ€¦" Price began, "Me and my men haven't been with any women in a long timeâ€¦ And there are some fine looking young ladies in there. I was thinking it would be a shame to let them go to wasteâ€¦"

Carlton gave him a devious grin, and said, "I don't care what happens to them. As long as word doesn't get out." At this, he shot a threatening glance at Alex.

Price smiled. "Thank you, sir. I shall go inform my men of theâ€¦ special event we will be having tonight." He saluted, and then left the building.

Alex left before, feeling disgusted. He had always hated Price, but his hatred was now more intense than ever. Not that he was surprised.

It was now more important than ever to figure out a way to break them out. The first few pieces of a plan were beginning to form in his mind, but he needed help. And he thought he knew just the person who could provide some.

But first, there was something he wanted to see.

He began walking towards the warehouse, being careful to avoid any of his superiors in case they wanted him to do something. When he got there, he took a deep breath and gathered his wits. What he was about to do was very risky; if he failed, it would almost certainly raise suspicions. And that was the last thing he wanted to do.

He approached one of the guards outside. "I'm to go in and relieve one of the officers on duty," he lied.

He was worried the guard would call him out on it. But he didn't.

"Okay then," the guard said. "Go on in."

Alex opened the doors and stepped inside. His eyes took a moment to

adjust to the gloom of the dimly-lit warehouse interior, but when they did, he froze in shock.

In the center of the warehouse, surrounded on all sides by heavily armed guards, was a huge cage. And in that cage, curled up in a corner, ebony wings folded against its side, was a dragon.

Alex recognized it as not just any dragon, but the one from that animated movie that came out a few years before.

"Jesus Christ," he gasped, as he took a shaky step forward. _Am I really seeing this?_

He knew he was. Unless it was a dream, he was looking at a real dragon. And he realized why Carlton was so sure that this was the Beast. It would be a perfect candidate for it.

Maybe it is.

His thoughts went back to Matt, and he chuckled inwardly. _Guess his dragon obsession really paid off. I wouldn't be surprised if Sam was in there too._

One of the guards had noticed his shock, and chuckled. "We've seen a lot of that today," he yelled. When Alex didn't reply, he got right to the point. "Why are you here?" he asked.

"I'm to relieve one of you from duty," Alex stated, praying that the guards would buy it. They did.

"I've been here the longest," said a guard in the back. "You can take my spot."

Nobody argued. Alex took his place, while the guard handed him his AK-47 and left the warehouse.

He looked around and realized that he was alone behind the cage. Of course; there was no back entrance, and therefore no way that someone could sneak up on them without coming through the front. He saw that nobody was watching, and risked a quick glance back at the dragon.

It was staring at him.

He jumped a little bit, but then regained control of his reflexes. Nobody had noticed him yet, so he kept looking.

The dragon didn't look hostile. Instead, as Alex looked into its green eyes, he saw pain. Whether it was physical or emotional, he did not know.

There was something different about this one.

Shade knew it, and beneath the pain from his shoulder it was all he could think of as he stared at the guard on the other side of the cage. Other than the shock he was used to seeing when most humans first met him, none of the other guards seemed to have spared him a second glance, except for when he moved. This one, however, seemed at the very least interested in him.

The pain from his spine and shoulder returned. It had gone down a little more, but it was still intense. But even though it clouded his mind a little bit, he had a good feeling about this one. He wouldn't be willing to act on it, but he had the feeling that this one was good.

But it was only a feeling. It didn't really mean anything right now.

After a few more moments of studying the human, he laid his head back on his paws, closed his eyes, and tried to push the pain away.

A couple hours later, Alex was finally relieved from duty. As he walked outside, he realized it was now late afternoon, and his time was running out. While he was guarding the dragon, he had begun to think up a plan. By the time he was let off, he had one fully formed in his mind. But he needed help.

Luckily, he knew just the person to ask.

He walked- as Carlton didn't like his men using cars, because it wasted the gas he had stored away- back to his neighborhood on Deer Run Street. The person he needed to talk to lived on the same street as him. He didn't know if he was home, but Alex had a feeling he was. Carlton didn't trust him, and rarely gave him anything to do. As a result, he stayed home a lot.

Alex walked up to his door and knocked, removing his gas mask as he did so. He waited a few seconds, and then knocked again. He was about to give up and leave when the door opened.

Inside was a teen of about Alex's age, and of average height. He had short, brown hair, and a long, slender head. He was wearing a pair of blue jeans, a green T-shirt, and a gray sweatshirt.

"Alex," he greeted. "What's up?"

"I need to talk to you, Jeremy," he stated, getting right to the point.

"Well, come in," Jeremy invited, holding the door open.

Alex stepped through the doorway and walked into the kitchen, setting down his gas mask on the table, and sitting in one of the chairs. His dirty blonde hair was messy and sticking out in places from helmet head. Jeremy sat opposite him, and asked, "What do you need to talk about?"

Alex searched his mind for the words to start the conversation. Finally, he found them. "Have you heard anything about what's happened?"

"Yes," Jeremy replied. "Not much, but a little bit. All I know is that they took some prisoners. They say they're accomplices of The Man in Black."

"Yes," Alex confirmed. "And they're going to be executed. But there's more. They found something else as well, and are guarding it in the warehouse."

"What is it?"

"I was wondering that same thing, especially after hearing what Carlton said about it. They all think it's the Beast."

Jeremy was shocked. "They caught it?"

"I don't know. It fits the description as well as anything, so probably. But at the same time, I'm not a hundred percent sure if the prisoners are really with The Man in Black."

"Wait, I thought you didn't know what it was?"

"I didn't. But I found out."

"What is it?"

Alex described his encounter with the dragon to him. The whole time, Jeremy's face seemed to grow more and more incredulous. "Are you serious?" he asked when he was finally done. "They caught a _Night Fury?_"

"Is that what they're called?" Alex asked.

"Yeah."

"Then yes."

Jeremy stared off into space in a mixture of wonder and disbelief. "My Godâ€¦" he whispered. Normally, he wouldn't have believed a word Alex had said about the dragon, but times were strange. With all this talk of genetic engineering causes the zombie pathogen, he was beginning to wonder what else had been made. And now, it looked like he might have had an answer.

"And there's even more. I was guarding the prisoners earlier while they were led out to be tortured by _Price_, " he accented the man's name with disgust. "I may not have seen all of them, but I saw some of them. And I _know _that three of them were Matt, Brian, and Joey."

If Jeremy could possibly look any more shocked, Alex would be surprised.

"So they're aliveâ€¦" he said. "Figures that Matt would join the team with the Night Fury. Say, was Sam with them?"

"I don't know," Alex chuckled. "But yes, they're alive. At least, until tomorrow, when they're to be executed."

Jeremy's expression turned from one of awe to one of grim realization. "Then we need to get them out of there. But how?"

Alex grinned. "That's what I _really _wanted to talk to you about. I have a plan."

Jeremy was silent for a moment, and then returned the grin. "Let's hear it, then."

* * *

><p>Alright, that's chapter twenty! Let me know what you think!

22. Chapter Twenty-One: Jailbreak

****Ugh, sorry I'm late again, I've had a really busy last few days.****

****Anyway, so this is the chapter that contains that attempted (but interrupted before anything really happens) rape scene I told you about. For those of you who have triggers, I'll put a warning up beforehand.****

****Also there is drug use if that offends anybody.****

****Anyway, a lot of people have also been asking when the Pokemon might be coming in, and to that I say: soon. Very soon. Just be patient.****

****Anyway, mandatory disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies. Never have, never will.****

****Now enjoy.****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter
Twenty-One:

****Jailbreak****

****Gunnerville, New Hampshire****

The plan was all set up, and they were ready to go.

Alex had explained it to Jeremy, and Jeremy had helped him revise it as needed. When they finally had it complete, they put it into action.

First and foremost, they needed weapons. That was difficult, because Carlton liked to keep all the firearms under lock and key. Due to a high risk of discovery, they couldn't do that, and were forced to improvise that part. Remembering Price's request, Alex came up with the idea that they wait until he and his men were about to have their way with the girls, and then somehow take out the guards and steal their guns. Then, they would have the element of surprise.

They couldn't get an escape vehicle either; Carlton only gave vehicles to his most elite men, and even then they were only rarely used. Gas was getting harder and harder to come by. They would have to escape the town by other means.

That left the actual operation. Alex had an idea for that, too.

He was going to go in with two knives, and take out the two guards out front simultaneously, using the element of surprise. Then, he would take their guns and use them to free the prisoners. After that, they would kill Price and his men- hopefully before they could rape

anybody- and get back to Alex's house, where they would regroup and come up with an escape plan.

There was, however, one setback. Due to the solar panels, the prison had power, and there were security cameras. Fortunately, Jeremy knew how to cut off the power. Right when Alex walked in, he would do so, and Alex would be free to do his dirty work unseen.

However, Price and his men would get suspicious. He would have to do it quickly. They would just have to pray that they were lucky.

It was almost nightfall now, and they were making their way to the prison through the woods.

"This better work," said Jeremy.

"It'll work," Alex replied.

"How can you be sure?"

"I just am." To tell the truth, he wasn't. But he didn't want to admit that.

They walked in silence for several more minutes, before finally coming to the prison.

They could see it through the trees. It wasn't full dark yet, and as far as Alex knew, Price hadn't gotten there. Of course, he could be wrong.

"Get down," said Alex. They sank to the ground, and lay hidden among the leaves, not moving. To someone casually looking into the woods from the prison entrance, they would have been almost invisible in the dying light.

They waited there for about an hour before they saw a group of soldiers heading towards the entrance. It was almost completely dark out now, but Alex was certain it was Price and his men.

"As soon as they go in, wait about a minute, and then proceed with the plan," Alex commanded.

Price and his men reached the prison door and entered it. As the door closed behind them, Alex started counting.

The wait was perhaps one of the longest ones of his life. Every second they waited could be one where two young girls were brutalized by these perverted monsters. But there was nothing else he could do.

When the minute finally passed, he whispered, "Go." Him and Jeremy ran across the lawn, Alex to the front and Jeremy around the back. Alex paused for a moment in front of the door, and then opened it.

„Please workâ€|_ he prayed.

He was even luckier than he had hoped. Not only were Price and his men gone, but the guards in front of the door to the cells had gone with them as well. It was a straight shot to the prisoners.

But there were still the other guards on the other side of the door. Price wouldn't have let them come. He would've made them stay. Still, with both the power out and the element of surprise, Alex would be able to take them out.

Suddenly, as if in sync with his thoughts, the lights dimmed, and then shut off. Alex blinked a few times to get used to the gloom, and walked to the door. He opened it.

"â€|the fuck?" he heard someone say in confusion. He saw the outline of the guard in front of him, drew his combat knife, and drove the handle into his gas mask.

The guard fell backwards. Behind him, Alex heard the other guard raise his gun to fire. Before he could, however, Alex brought his elbow back into his face, and knocked him out.

"What's going on?" he heard someone ask from the first cell. Not saying a word, Alex knelt over the guard's body and felt around before finding a key ring.

He stood up and walked over to the first cell. In the dim light, he could only see the face of the man he had first seen being dragged from Price's torture chamber- the bearded one. As he began fumbling with the keys, searching for the right one, the man asked, "Who are you?"

"There'll be time for questions later," said Alex as he found the right key and unlocked the cell. He held the door open and let them out, pressing the key into the man's hand. "Take this and let the others out, and meet us in the woods out front. I need to take care of those bastards that took those girls."

Without another word, he left the room, picking up both of the guard's automatics on his way. He found Jeremy waiting for him, and passed him one of the guns. "They're out. Let's go take care of those fuckers."

Jeremy brandished the weapon and replied, "Alright."

Alex opened the door leading to Price's interrogation chamber, where tearful screams were echoing from. He followed them to the storage closet, and motioned to Jeremy: _on three_.

Jeremy nodded. Alex reached into his pocket, pulled out a flashlight, and turned it on. Then, he started the countdown.

One.

Two.

Three.

He kicked the door open and shined the flashlight in. It turned out to be unnecessary, though, as they had set up a lantern.

Alex felt sick and disgusted as he saw that the brunette was lying on the chair that Price used as his interrogation chair. Fortunately,

she was still clothed, and it looked like they hadn't done anything yet. Price liked to play with his victims first.

Pure hatred filled his heart, and Alex opened fired on the men kneeling over her. The last thing he saw was their shocked faces before they fell in a cloud of blood.

Next to him, Jeremy was firing as well. Before any of the soldiers had a chance to fight back, almost all of them were down. After about ten seconds, only Price himself was left, pointing his gun straight at them.

"Are you out of your mind?" he yelled.

"No," Alex replied. "I feel saner than I have in months. I'm tired of your shit, Price."

Price attempted to calm himself down. "We can talk about this," he said.

"No. No we can't."

"Who are you, anyway?"

Alex couldn't help himself. He wanted Price to see who it was who ended him. He ripped off his gas mask and flung it to the ground. "Alex," he announced. "Alex Hansbury."

Price's face contorted into one of confusion. "You're just a kid," he said.

Alex thought of replying, but decided against it. He pulled the trigger, and Price's blood splattered the wall behind him.

Alex picked up his gas mask and put it back on. The brunette was staring at him in shock, as was the silver-haired girl, who was standing in the corner with blood on her shirt. One of the dead soldiers was at her feet. His blood must have splashed onto her.

Jeremy went over to release the brunette, while Alex went over to comfort the silver-haired girl.

"Are you okay?" he asked. She stared at him in shock, a tear running down her face. "Are you okay?" he repeated.

She snapped out of her shock, and nodded. "Yeah," she said. "Thank you."

"What's your name?"

"Samantha."

"Okay." Alex turned and walked over to Jeremy and the brunette, who was now standing up. "Is she okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," Jeremy replied. "We got here just in time."

"Good," Alex replied. He turned to the girl and asked, "What's your name?"

"Alena," she replied.

"Alright. Nice to meet you both. Now, pick up some of these guns; we need some for your friends. They should be waiting for us outside."

"You got them out?" asked Samantha.

"Yeah," Alex replied.

"But why?" asked Alena. "Why are you helping us?"

"Because I hate Carlton just as much as you," Alex replied. "And I know Matt, Brian and Joey."

"Really?" asked Samantha.

"Yeah," replied Jeremy. "I do too."

"We're wasting time," said Alex. "We need to leave now."

They began searching the bodies for guns and ammo, taking as much as they could carry- albeit Samantha did so reluctantly. Then, they left the room, going back to the main entrance.

When they reached the front door, Alex motioned for the others to stay back, then opened the door slowly and poked his head out. When he saw that the coast was clear, he walked through it.

He began running towards the woods across the street. As he did, he noticed that the prisoners were waiting there- they were hidden well, but he had been looking for them.

When he reached them, they stepped out into the open. He was shocked again when he saw that Ben was among them as well.

"No," said Alex. "Get back in the woods."

When they were all safely hidden, Samantha and Alena joined the others. Matt went up to Samantha. "Are you okay?" he asked. "Did theyâ€¦| you knowâ€¦|?"

"No," she replied shakily. "No, they didn't. They came close, but they didn't."

Several members of the group let out sighs of relief. "How about you, Alena?" asked Ben.

Alena was much more shaken up than Samantha. "I'll live," she said.

"Thank you so much," said Trent to Alex and Jeremy. "I don't know how to repay you."

"You can repay us by helping us get out of this town," Jeremy replied.

"Okay," said Lucas. "But how?"

"We have a plan," Alex explained. "But you'll need to follow us. And you'll need these." He started handing out the guns. Jeremy, Samantha and Alena followed suit.

When everyone was armed, Alex started walking in the direction of his house. After some hesitation, the group followed him.

They followed the two soldiers through the woods, crossing roads when they had to. Matt was nervous the entire time- he was constantly paranoid that someone would find them. But by the time they were halfway through the trip, it was nighttime, and it would be hard for anyone to find them.

He was worried about Shade. If the man in charge found out they escaped before they were able to rescue him, would they take it out on him?

The one thing he knew, though, was that they had to get him out. But first, they had to get to a safe place to think of a plan.

They kept walking for another hour before they finally reached their destination. When they came into full view of it, Matt gasped.

It was Alex's old house.

"I know this place," said Matt.

"Me too," Ben replied. "This was Alex's place."

Nobody else said anything. They walked through Alex's yard and to his door, where one of the soldiers produced a key from his pocket and let them in.

When they were all safely inside, the soldier looked up and down the street, making sure nobody had seen them, and then shut the door, locking it from the inside.

"We're safe for now," he said. "Make yourselves at home."

Something had been bugging Matt for a while, but he hadn't been able to tell what. Now, it came to him- he recognized the soldier's voice.

"Doâ€¦| Do I know you?" he asked.

The soldier laughed. Then, he said, "Yes. You do." He took off his gas mask, and Matt felt his heart stop.

It was Alex.

"Oh my Godâ€¦|" said Matt. "Alex! I can't believe you're still alive!"

"I can't believe _you're_ still alive," Alex replied.

"Neither can I," said the other soldier, who was removing his gas mask. When Matt saw that it was Jeremy, he almost passed out in shock.

"Ohhhhh, okay," said Ben. "This all makes sense now."

"Alex, Jeremy, I've never been so glad to see either of you," said Joey.

"Pretty much what he just said," said Brian, pointing at Joey.

"We'll have time to catch up later," said Alex. "Right now, we need to get out of this town. Come into the basement; I'll tell you our plan there."

About forty-five minutes before the group had reached Alex's house, Carlton had been sitting in the Town Hall, bored out of his mind. He decided to check on Price, and see how he was doing.

He got up and walked across his office- a small room complete with a rug, a desk with a lamp on it, and two chairs; one behind the desk, and one across the room.

When he reached his desk, he pulled open the top drawer to get his radio. It was tucked in right next to a small baggie of cocaine.

Seeing the coke, he decided he was in a mood for a quick fix. He took out the baggie, and prepared a line of powder on the desk in front of him. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a dollar bill and rolled it into a straw.

Just before he took it, he pressed the button on the radio. "Price?" he asked. "How's it going over there?"

He lowered his right nostril to the makeshift straw and snorted up the powder. He then sat down in the chair and leaned back, letting the coke do its work. About a minute passed before he realized that Price hadn't answered him.

He leaned forward and pressed the button again. "Price?" he called.

No answer.

"Price?" he said again.

Still no reply.

He buzzed the guards at the prison, and they didn't respond either. Carlton knew then that something was wrong. He buzzed his second in command, Hunter.

"Yes, sir?" Hunter replied.

"Listen, Hunter," Carlton ordered. "Something's happened at the prison. Nobody's responding. I need you to take as many men as you can and meet me down there." He paused a moment, before adding, "Bring the cars. We might need them."

Fifteen minutes later, Carlton was pulling up to the prison in his like-new Porsche. Waiting for him were six other cars, not nearly as valuable as his. He opened the door and stepped out, holding a lit cigarette in his hand. Someone once told him he did too many drugs,

and that it would one day kill him. He didn't care.

He walked over to Hunter, who was wearing his gasmask. Beneath the gas mask, he was a short yet muscular Asian man, with lightly tanned skin, short black hair, and green eyes.

"What's the situation?" he asked.

"It's bad, sir," Hunter replied. "The prisoners are gone, and everybody's dead."

A feeling of rage filled his chest. "Price?" he asked.

"Him too."

A roar of anger escaped his lips, and he threw his cigarette to the ground, stomping it out. "Hunter, I want these prisoners found. Understand?"

"Sir!" a soldier from inside the prison called. "There's a survivor! He's alive, but not for long! Better come quickly!"

Carlton met what he could only assume was Hunter's gaze, and held it for a brief moment. Then, they both turned and entered the prison.

The soldier led them to Price's interrogation room, and Carlton flinched when he saw the mess that was waiting for them. Normally, violence did not faze him, but he had known these men personally; had liked them.

His heart lurched when he saw Price's body among them. Anger, searing hot, spread through him. "Those dirty fuckers," he seethed.

Leaning against the wall, with a hole in his side that was slowly seeping blood, was the only surviving soldier. Carlton walked over to him, leaned down, and talked into his ear. "They had to have had help," he said, his voice dangerously calm. "Who? Who did this?"

"Heâ€¦ He said his name was Hansbury. Alexâ€¦ Hansbury," the man choked out between gasps of pain.

"I know him," said the soldier who had led them in. "He lives over on Deer Run."

Carlton's head snapped back to him. "Take two cars and a dozen men to his house. I want that traitorous bastard dead, as well as the prisoners."

"Sir!" the soldier saluted, then ran out of the room.

Carlton then turned to Hunter. "I need you to take three cars and as many men as you can to the warehouse. That's where they'll go first, and if we can't catch them at Hansbury's house, we can still catch them there. I'll take my car and one of yours to the town gate to hold off the exit there. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Hunter confirmed.

"Good." Carlton turned to leave, and then remembered something. "Oh, and have someone take care of this poor fellow," he said, gesturing to the wounded soldier.

Alex had led the group into his basement. Now, they were all sitting or standing in a circle next to his TV, exchanging stories as to what they had all been doing since Z-Day.

When the stories were finished, nobody said anything. Finally, Alena broke the silence by asking, "How did they find us?"

"Well, as far as I know, they found you two-" he gestured to Tim and Lucas- "by chance. Carlton had sent out a patrol, and they found you on their way back. Once they had captured you, Carlton had a feeling that there might be more, so he set various ambushes up near the border." He paused, before adding, "It looks like it worked."

"We need to get out of here," said Trent.

"I agree," said Brian. "What are we doing just sitting here?"

"We need to get Shade out, first," Matt added.

Alex's brow furrowed in confusion. "Who's Shade?" he asked. Suddenly, he remembered the Night Fury he had seen, and said, "Oh, you mean the dragon?"

Matt nodded. "Yeah. You know about him?"

"Yeah, I guarded him once. I know exactly where he is," Alex replied. "Don't worry, that was part of the plan."

"What exactly is the plan?" asked Samantha.

"Follow our lead," Jeremy answered.

"Sounds simple enough," Lucas commented. "I like it."

"First, however, you'll need some armor." Alex stood up and walked over to the closet, opening it. Inside was a large collection of bulletproof vests and gas masks.

"I stole some from the town vault," he explained, pulling one out and handing it to Brian. "Put them on. If we get in a gunfight, you'll need them."

Matt stepped up and collected one, then began strapping it on. It was heavy, and a little tight, but it was usable.

Once it was on, he put the gas mask over his head. It was heavy as well, but he could get used to it.

He watched through the eyepieces as the others did the same. When they were all done, they collected their guns- Matt got an awesome FAL- and Alex and Jeremy led the way through a door and into the garage.

"How do you walk around with these things on all the time_?" asked Joey. "They're heavy as fuck."

"They aren't _that _bad," said Jeremy. "So shut up and deal with it."

As they approached the window of the garage, Alex cursed and he and Jeremy dove for cover. "Get down!" Alex whispered.

Matt looked around for the nearest hiding place. Eventually, he settled on the corner next to the door leading outside. As the others scrambled for hiding places as well, he asked, "What's wrong?"

"Carefully look out the window," Jeremy whispered.

Holding his breath, Matt stood up slowly until he was in a crouch. He sneaked a peek out the window, and then immediately drew back. The whole driveway was crawling with soldiers.

"Shit!" he cursed. "How'd they find us?"

"I don't know," said Alex. "But we've got to find another way out. Let's try the back door, upstairs."

"Wait, they found us?" asked Joey.

"Yeah," Matt replied.

"Well ain't that fuckin' dandy," said Lucas and Ben at the same time. They then met each other's gaze, and Ben whispered, "Damn copier."

"Follow me," Alex commanded. He began to crawl back across the garage towards the door. Once he was through, Jeremy followed.

One by one, the others crawled through the door, until only Matt was left. He began crawling across the room, his heart in his chest, until he reached it. He crawled through it, and Brian slammed the door behind him.

He lay on the floor, taking deep breaths. "That was close," he breathed.

Brian held out his hand. "We need to go," he said. "Now."

"You're right," said Alex. "Follow me to the backdoor."

He led them upstairs and through the kitchen, to the back porch. Right next to the entrance to the back porch was a door, which led to a backyard on the other side of the house from where the soldiers were.

"Get into the woods," said Alex. "Keep everyone else in your sight. Most of all, follow me and Jeremy. We'll make sure they aren't following us, then circle around to the warehouse where Shade's being kept."

Nobody said anything. They merely nodded.

"Go," said Alex calmly. He silently opened the door and ran out, into the woods. Jeremy was right behind.

Seizing the opportunity before his nerves could get the best of him, Matt went next, and then Brian. One by one, they ran.

Matt thought they were free, when he heard a shout. Risking a quick glance around, he saw the soldiers coming around the corner of the house, aiming at them.

"Shit!" he yelled. "Run!"

They double-timed it as the soldiers started to open fire. Matt reached the woods just as the bullets started flying past him, and put trees in between him and the soldiers. He paused just for a moment to make sure those behind him were okay, and then kept running.

There was a sudden, jarring pain in his right shoulder, causing him to stumble. He looked at it, and saw that his bulletproof vest had been grazed.

Thank God for that vest, he thought, and kept running.

"Stop!" a voice rang out over the air.

The soldiers had been running into the woods, when their leader had issued the command. Now, they all stopped in their tracks and turned to look at them.

Chris Maverick was third in command of Gunnerville, but he liked to think of himself as second-and-a-half. In his eyes, Hunter was an idiot, and he wouldn't last long if Carlton bit the dust. Then it would be Maverick's turn.

He was in charge here. The soldier who had identified Alex Hansbury had come to him for men, and he had gladly given him some- on the condition that he led the mission.

The soldiers looked at him as if he were crazy. "We all know where they're going, don't we?" he asked, in his harsh, tough voice. He took off his gas mask to take a breath of fresh air, and lifted a hand to his face to stroke his thick, light brown mustache. His hair was short, and neatly combed, and his eyes were a deep green. While he let his mustache grow, he shaved his chin whenever he could. He didn't like beards.

"But sir, Carlton-"

"Fuck Carlton," said Maverick. "Carlton isn't here. And I'm in charge. We'll never catch them all in there, and we know where they're going, so why bother?"

"Where _are_ they going, sir?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Isn't it obvious?" he asked. "When we ambushed them- and I know, I was on that squad myself- we took something from them. Something they won't leave without. We put it in the warehouse. That's where they're going."

"Sir?" asked another. "What's in the warehouse?"

Maverick sighed, and walked over to the soldier who had spoken.

Staring him right in the eye, he said, "You'll find out soon enough."

He turned towards the cars, carrying his automatic over his shoulder and putting his mask back on with his left hand. "Come on. Let's go help that idiot Hunter."

Matt kept running through the woods, always making sure to keep Alex in sight.

When he finally stopped running, Matt went over to him and knelt down, trying to get his breath back.

"Did we lose them?" he asked.

Alex nodded. "I think so. But they'll know where we're going. We're going to have to be prepared."

Around them, the others were arriving. Matt did a quick headcount, and confirmed that everyone was there. "Are you all okay?" he asked.

Ben, who had gotten there last, grunted and said, "I got hit in the back, but this vest took the damage for me. Hurt like a bitch, though."

"Okay," said Matt. "Anyone else?"

Nobody said anything.

"Okay," he said. He glanced at Alex. "Lead the way."

They continued the trek through the forest, this time walking instead of running. Alex began to circle around from where they were to what Matt could only assume to be the warehouse.

"Are you sure you know where you're going?" Alena asked him after a while.

"Yeah," said Alex. "I've lived here all my life; I've had time to know these woods well. Especially in the months after Z-Day before Carlton took over."

After about a half an hour, they were finally there.

They knelt in the underbrush, allowing the darkness to camouflage them. In front of them was a large, grey building that lived up to the name warehouse. Surrounding the entrance were five cars and at least thirty men.

"This is where Shade is?" asked Matt.

"Yeah," said Alex.

"You sure?"

"Positive."

"There's way too many of them," said Jeremy. "We can't fight them all."

"I know," said Alex. He thought for a moment, and then said, "Ben, come over here."

Ben crawled over to him, and Alex began whispering in his ear. When he was done, Ben nodded. "Sounds good to me."

"What?" asked Matt.

"We can't take fight them all," said Alex. "Not while they're all alert."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about making a distraction."

"What do you mean?" asked Jeremy.

"You'll see. When the time is right, run. Shoot whoever you can, and get into the warehouse. Once you free Shade, he can help you. Oh, and try to get a car or two. You'll need them to escape."

"What about you?" asked Matt.

"Well, you see," Alex began, searching for the words. He made brief eye contact with Ben, and then made a gesture forward. Ben nodded.

"We're the distraction."

Simultaneously, before anyone could do anything to stop them, they stood up and ran towards the warehouse, firing at the soldiers.

* * *

><p>So, I hope you liked that one, and I hope you're not ready to kill me over the cliffhangers I keep leaving you on. Stay tuned for this Sunday's chapter!

Also: There are only five chapters left of Part One. The finale is coming, and soon!

Just a quick explanation: by part one, I don't mean book one. There are a planned four books in this story, with three parts each (well, maybe not _each,_ but for one and two at least). Part One of Book One is almost over.

Anyway, see you later!

23. Chapter Twenty-Two: On the Run

UGH sorry AGAIN for the delay.

Anyway, here's chapter twenty-two. Hope you guys like it!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.

* * *

<p>Chapter Twenty-Two:

****On the Run****

****Gunnerville, New Hampshire****

Matt had to restrain himself from yelling. He knew it was too late to convince Ben and Alex not to do it. The bullets had already started firing. If anyone else in the group yelled, Matt couldn't hear it. The sound was drowned out by the noise of gunfire. He could only watch and pray as Alex and Ben ran towards the cover of the trees on the other side, shooting sideways at the soldiers.

He saw one of the soldiers go down, a red spray fountaining out of his gas mask. Another went down clutching his right arm. Still, Ben and Alex kept running, and the bullets kept flying.

Matt began assessing the situation. All of the soldiers were momentarily distracted. They would have to go before they overcame the shock at seeing Alex and Ben jump out of nowhere. One of the five cars was in between them and the entrance. If they could get rid of that, they would have a clear shotâ€¦

"Aim for the car!" Matt yelled. He began shooting at the car, a large red van. Bullet holes peppered the side, and soldiers began returning fire. Next to him, other members of the group started firing at it as well.

Matt looked over and saw Jeremy reaching into his pocket and pulling out a small object. As Matt looked closer, he realized it was a hand grenade.

Jeremy stood up, pulled the pin, and threw it as hard as he could. The grenade landed right under the car.

They waited. The grenade went off

The van exploded in a huge cloud of smoke and fire. A deafening bang assaulted Matt's eardrums, and all of the soldiers around it were either killed or thrown to the ground.

"We have a straight shot! Three of you, come with me!" Jeremy ordered. "The rest of you provide covering fire!" Matt, Trent and Alena stood up with him before anybody else could. "Okay, go!"

The four of them ran across the grass towards the explosion. Matt heard- and _felt_- a bullet whiz past his arm, and he saw a soldier pointing his gun at him. He raised his FAL and fired, hitting the soldier in the arm and incapacitating him.

They were halfway to the entrance, and the soldiers were overcoming the shock of the explosion. There were more of them firing now. Matt kept shooting, hitting one in the mask and killing him, and hitting another in the leg.

Three-fourths of the way there. Matt kept firing. Another soldier dropped to the ground clutching his hand, a red spray fountaining from it. One bullet almost hit Matt's head, but barely missed. Finally they were at the door.

Two soldiers were waiting for them. Jeremy and Matt reached them first, and Matt bashed one on the head with his gun. The soldier dropped like a rock. Next to him, Jeremy did the same. He opened the door and the four of them ran inside.

Matt stopped in his tracks at the sight in front of him. The warehouse was big and empty. There were no windows or doors whatsoever except for the one that they had just entered from. Light bulbs hung from the ceiling, providing dim light. In the center of the warehouse was a giant cage, and inside the giant cage, Shade lay curled up in a corner, looking right at them, his ears pricked. His eyes were glazed with pain, as he had not had any painkillers in a while.

There were four soldiers guarding him. Due to the armor Matt and Jeremy wore, the guards didn't realize who they were. Instead, the first one stepped forward, gun at the ready, and asked, "Who are you?"

As a reply, Jeremy fired his weapon, and the bullets tore through the man's mask, spraying blood everywhere. He fell to the ground.

The other three soldiers ran towards them, weapons at the ready. Before any could fire, Matt, Alena and Trent shot. Before they could take another five steps, they were all dead.

Matt stared at the carnage in horror. Now that the passion of the fight was dying, he realized what he had been doing. He had never killed another human before. He had done what he had had to do, but it didn't change the facts.

He was startled out of his horrified trance by Jeremy's voice. "Guard the door," he said to Trent and Alena. "Matt, help me get him out."

"Wait," said Matt. He pulled off his mask, and saw Shade's eyes immediately lighten up in recognition. The dragon stood up shakily, grunting in pain.

"Time to go, buddy," said Matt. Shade nodded, and shot a ball of fire at the cage. The explosion tore away the steel mesh, and a whole side of it fell to the ground. Shade hopped out and made his way over to where they were waiting.

Jeremy stepped forward. "My God!" he said. "This is awesome." Shade looked at him curiously. "Hey Shade," Jeremy introduced himself. "I'm Jeremy. I helped your friends get out."

Shade looked at Matt, his eyes asking if Jeremy was being truthful. Matt nodded.

Shade switched his gaze to Jeremy, and bowed his head in the Night Fury way of greeting someone.

"Sorry to be a buzz kill," Trent shouted, "But we need to go!"

Some of the soldiers had found out they were in the warehouse, and were trying to get in. Trent and Alena were holding the door closed, but not for long.

"Right," said Matt, putting his mask back on. "Shade, can you help?"

Shade gritted his teeth and nodded. He flicked his tail to the side, motioning for them to get out of the way.

Matt stepped back and stood by the dragon, resting his hand on his wing. Suddenly, his gaze drifted to something in the corner of the warehouse. "Wait," he said.

"We don't have-"

"Just hold on." Matt walked over to the corner, and found a pile of guns and ammo. The supplies they had brought with them.

As quickly as he could, he dumped some ammo into his pockets. Jeremy walked up behind him and did the same. They were about to leave, when Matt noticed something else.

Samantha's gun.

He picked it up, thinking that it was the least expendable gun they had. Then, he and Jeremy walked back over to the door. "Alena, take this to Samantha," he said, and tossed her the gun.

She caught it, and held it at her side, nodding.

"Okay," said Matt. "Now get away from the door."

"But-" Trent started to protest.

"I know. Trust me."

Trent hesitantly backed off. Alena stared at him for a moment, before letting it go and running to the side.

For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then, the door burst open, and about five men came rushing in. Before they could shoot even one bullet, however, Shade blasted them away.

"Whoo-hoo!" yelled Trent. "Now that's what I'm talking about!"

"Get in the cars!" said Jeremy. "They're our best chance!"

The four humans ran outside. Shade fell behind at the door- it took him a few moments to squeeze through. During that time, the others covered him, and shot at anyone who tried to target him. He fired one more shot, to add to the chaos and confusion and buy them more time.

Once he was through, Matt ran to the nearest car- a large, white van- and opened the back door. "Shade!" he yelled. "Get in!"

Shade bounded over, ignoring the pain, and jumped in the back. Matt slammed the door behind him and ran to the driver's seat.

A soldier met him there, swinging a knife. It would have taken a large chunk out of his throat, had Trent not been following him. A bullet whizzed through the soldier's head and he fell to the

ground.

"Let's go, before one of us stops getting lucky," said Trent. He jumped in the car and climbed over to the passenger seat. Matt got in the driver's seat and slammed the door. The keys were still in the ignition; the soldiers must not have thought they had a chance at taking one of the cars. He turned it and began driving.

As he moved, he started observing the scene. Bullets were flying everywhere. He saw another car- another van, this one black- start driving. It was going towards where Joey, Brian, Lucas and Samantha were. At first Matt thought it might be filled with soldiers, but then he saw other soldiers shooting at it.

There were bodies everywhere, but still a lot of soldiers left alive. As far as he could see, none of them had been killed.

At the edge of his vision, in the woods, something else caught his eye. Flashes. From guns. Two of them, to be exact.

"There they are," said Matt. He hit the gas and began steering in their direction. In front and to his side, he saw soldiers running out of their way, and heard the pings of bullets hitting the car, but he ignored them.

Next to him, Trent opened a window that led into the back of the van, and Shade poked his head out.

They had reached the tree line on the other side of the field, and Matt pulled over in front of where the bullets were firing from. Trent opened the door and yelled for the two of them to get in.

Ben and Alex came running out of the woods and into the car. Trent moved over, and the four of them managed to squeeze into the three-seater. Shade was forced to move his head back to give them room, but was still able to look out.

Alex noticed the dragon, and said, "You got him out? Good."

"Shade, this is Alex," Matt said. "He's the brains behind this operation."

Shade nudged the back of Alex's head in appreciation.

"You're welcome," he said.

When everyone was in, Trent slammed the door shut and Matt floored it. On the other side of the field, he saw the black van driving as well. They both headed for the road that led away from the warehouse.

Beside the dying flames from the remnants of the exploded truck, Maverick watched with fury as the vans drove away. He looked around at the last few soldiers who were shooting, and at the dead and wounded on the ground.

"FUCK!" he screamed, stomping the ground. "We had them! How the fuck did they get away! Nobody gets that lucky!"

His gaze rested on one of the remaining cars- a large, black Ford 4X4

with a machine gun in the back- and an idea came to him.

"Everyone who can still fight, get in one of the cars!" he ordered.

"No," said a voice behind him. He turned around, ready to punch whoever it was in the jaw, when he saw that it was Hunter.

"They don't take orders from you," said Hunter. "Not while I'm around."

Maverick clenched his fists in fury, but decided it wasn't a battle worth fighting. "Fine," he said between clenched teeth.

Hunter turned towards the others, and ordered, "Get in the cars! All of you! We're going after them!"

Maverick had to restrain himself from lashing out at him. Hunter knew he had been right, but wasn't able to stand someone else giving orders.

"I'll take this car," he said instead, and ran over to the 4X4 and got in the driver's seat. Hunter ran towards the other, another 4X4 with a machine gun, except this one was gray.

The remaining men got in the trucks. Five of them got in the vehicle with Maverick, and four more got in the back. When they were all ready, Maverick took the lead, and Hunter followed. He preferred to have someone else in front.

Not two minutes had passed before they realized they were being followed.

Matt noticed first when he looked in his rearview mirror. Behind him, he could see the black van, but behind that, he saw two large trucks gaining on them.

"Motherfuck," he cursed. "They're following us."

"Chase scene!" Ben cheered. "Yeah!"

"This isn't a joke, Ben!" Matt exclaimed in annoyance. "I need you three to be ready. If they catch up, there will be blood."

He pressed his foot harder on the gas, accelerating more. But it did no good. The trucks just got closer. And as they got closer, he saw something else as well.

They had machine guns.

"Jesus Christ," he whispered.

"What's wrong?" asked Alex.

"Look at the trunks."

The three of them turned and looked simultaneously. "What?" asked Trent, who was unable to see. "What is it?"

"They have a looooooot of hardware," Ben replied.

"Take a right up here," said Alex.

Matt took the turn, and so did the black van behind them. Meanwhile, the trucks kept getting closer. Finally, they got within firing distance.

There was a faint whirring sound, and then several sharp, metallic pings echoed all throughout the interior of the vehicle. "Jesus Christ!" Matt yelled, swerving in a state of momentary distraction. He realized that fewer bullets hit the van when he did this, so he continued it.

Suddenly, Ben moved forward and pressed a button on the radio. "What the fuck are you doing, Ben?" asked Alex.

"We need some chase music!" Ben replied.

Luckily for him, the previous owners of the car had left a CD in it. He smiled, but his smile quickly faded as the slow, calm intro to Rise Against's "Roadside" came on.

"No!" Ben yelled. "Turn it off! Turn it the fuck off!" Ben was a Rise Against fan, but that one was their only song that he hated. He reached over and hit the next button, and the music stopped.

He sighed in relief. "That's better," he said. But his relief was short-lived, as Breaking Benjamin's "Rain" replaced it.

"What the fuck is this?" he moaned. He pressed the button again. Matt prayed that the next song would be suitable; Ben's button pressing was starting to distract him.

The machine guns momentarily ceased fire, and the trucks pulled closer. They had almost intercepted the black van, when Snow Patrols "Chasing Cars" started.

"Okay, now you're just being a jackass!" Ben yelled. He reached over to change it again, but Matt slapped his hand away and turned off the radio.

"No more music!" he barked.

"But -"

"No!"

Ben looked away, disappointed.

Matt's heart began pounding faster, as the bullets kept firing. Surely the van couldn't take much more of this abuse. They had to do something.

"Okay, I'm going to count to three," he said. "When I do, I want you to start shooting. Okay?"

The three of them nodded. "Okay," they said in unison.

"Three!" he said, and began to ease his foot off of the gas. "Two!" the others began to ready themselves, and his foot

completely separated from the gas pedal.

"One!" he shouted. He slammed on the brakes, stopping the van in its tracks. The black van narrowly avoided them, and the trucks caught up. As soon as they were even with the first one, Matt hit the gas again, and sped forward, keeping at the same pace as the truck.

While this was happening, Trent, Alex and Ben all leaned over and began shooting through the window. Glass shattered as bullets flew both ways. One of Ben's bullets struck a soldier in the back of the truck in the head, and he fell off of the truck into the road.

Ahead of them, the other members of the group were firing at the truck as well. The vests the soldiers wore gave them some form of resistance, but with no cover, they were quickly dispatched, until only the machine gunner was left.

"Aim for the gunner!" Matt yelled. Next to him, a bullet flew past, barely missing his head. Another hit the ceiling directly above Shade's head, and the dragon disappeared into the back for a moment. A moment later, he hesitantly reappeared.

Finally, the machine gunner took a bullet to the head, and he fell out of the back of the truck.

"Yeah!" Ben cheered. Then, in the heat of the moment, he stuck his fist out the window and extended his middle finger. "Suck on this, bitches!"

At that very instant, the machine gunner in the other truck began firing. Right as Ben was released his fingers from the gesture, a bullet went flying into his hand. Blood- and something else- flew forward, splashing the hood of the car and what was left of the windshield.

"FUCK!" Ben screamed at the top of his lungs. He clutched his bloody hand, trying to stop the bleeding. For a brief moment, Matt lost control of the van, and it swerved to the side of the road. At the last second, however, he regained control.

"Are you okay?" Trent asked.

"I just got shot!" Ben yelled. "Does it look like I'm fucking 'okay'?"

Meanwhile, the group in the black van was busy shooting the machine gun crew in the back truck. Seeing them as a bigger threat, the soldiers aimed for them van, giving Matt, Ben, Alex and Trent a moment of safety.

Alex was staring at a particularly bloody spot on the dashboard. "Guys," he said. "What's that?"

He pointed, and Trent and Ben both followed his gaze. Resting on the dashboard was a deformed, blood-soaked finger.

Ben looked at his right hand, and realized that his pinky was missing. "FUCK!" he screamed. He seized his gun and stuck it out the window, shooting at the truck behind them. "YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST

SHOOT MY FUCKING FINGER OFF? THINK AGAIN, ASSFUCKERS!"

Maverick looked to his side, and saw that one of the prisoners had started firing again. This time, it was at Hunter's car.

"Shoot him," he ordered to his fellow soldiers. As they were getting ready, however, something happened.

One of the bullets from the prisoner's gun got lucky, and hit one of Hunter's right tires. Moments later, another bullet hit the other tire, and Hunter lost control. His truck began swerving all along the side of the road, before finally crashing full-speed into a telephone pole. The truck was going so fast, the pole cut a clean trail through the engine, before finally stopping at the windshield. As if that wasn't enough, the force of the impact had shattered the base of the telephone pole, and it fell forwards, crushing the entire front of the car.

"Holy shit!" one of his men yelled.

"Looks like you've been promoted, sir," said his passenger.

Maverick would have time to reflect on that later. The one thing he knew was that now, the prisoners knew that the tire trick worked. And that he had to dispose of them as soon as he could.

"Focus your fire on the black van," he said. "I'll take care of these bastards."

He jerked the wheel to the left, and rammed the white van as hard as he could.

The van gave a sudden jerk to the left, and Matt nearly lost control. Trent was practically thrown onto his lap, and a few drops of Ben's blood splashed onto his mask. Ben and Alex fell sideways as well, and Shade's head momentarily disappeared.

"What the hell?" Matt yelled, as they were straightening themselves back up.

The black van took a sudden turn to the right. Matt swung the wheel sideways, and took the turn sharp, barely staying on the road. Almost as soon as he got his balance back, the van jerked again.

As they were pulling themselves back up again, Matt looked to the side to see the other truck pulling away from them. _They're ramming us,_ he thought.

He swung the steering wheel to the right and rammed the truck back. It swerved towards the edge of the road, and for a moment, Matt thought it would crash. But then it regained control.

"What the fuck?" Alex protested.

"They rammed us," said Matt. "So I rammed them back."

He swerved to the right again, this time meeting the truck halfway. They both momentarily lost control, and almost went off the road. But they both kept on.

Right when they were about to ram each other again, Matt looked ahead and saw that the black van had stopped, and that he was steering straight toward it. Quickly, he swerved out of the way and hit the brakes.

Their van stopped, and the truck kept going.

"What's going on?" asked Alex. "Why are we stopping?"

"I don't know," said Matt. He looked through the mirror and saw Jeremy get out of the driver's seat. The other occupants of the van followed.

Matt opened the door and got out, right as the truck ahead pulled to a stop. "What's wrong?" he called to Jeremy.

"We broke down!" Jeremy yelled back. "It took too many bullets!"

Suddenly, gunfire erupted from the truck. Matt ducked behind the door, and the others in the van ducked behind the dashboard. Shade's head disappeared into the back.

"Get out of the van!" he yelled. He waited for a momentary break in the line of fire, and then sprinted to the back of the van.

Moments later, Ben arrived, clutching his hand. Alex was right behind him, and Trent a few moments later

Behind them, the other members of their group began firing on the truck. Suddenly, Matt had an idea.

"Get back from the door," he instructed. The others moved back, and Matt opened the back door of the van.

"Shade," he said. The dragon looked at him questioningly. "Do you think you can get rid of that truck?"

He nodded, and rose to his legs. Hopping out of the van, he prepared himself, and waited for a break in the fire.

Maverick fired a whole clip of ammo at the prisoners, and didn't hit anyone.

"God dammit!" he cursed. "This is really starting to _piss me off!_"

He took cover and started reloading his gun, when one of the men yelled, "Look out!"

He turned back around and saw the dragon getting ready to fire at them. "Jesus Christ!" he yelled, getting to his feet and sprinting towards the edge of the road.

He was only halfway there when the dragon shot the fire bolt. It took less than a second for it to travel from him to the truck. The resulting explosion deafened him in both ears, lifted him off the ground, and sent him flying towards the woods.

The last thing he remembered was a jarring thud as he hit the

ground.

"Woo-hoo!" Matt yelled as the truck exploded. He patted Shade on the back. "Now that's what I'm talking about!" he exclaimed

Shade growled, as the touch made the pain in his shoulder flare up. "Oh. Sorry," said Matt.

Footsteps sounded from behind them, and Matt turned to see the others running up to them. "We can't stay here," said Jeremy. "Mind if he hitches a ride?"

"Sure," said Matt. "As long as you don't mind riding with Shade.

They loaded up into the van. First, Shade got in the back, followed by the wounded. Ben had been shot in the hand, Samantha in the arm, and Lucas in the leg. Then Joey, Brian and Alena squeezed in as well.

Matt shut the doors and got in the driver's seat. Alex and Trent sat in the passenger seats next to him, and they drove off.

Alex guided them to the front gate. It took ten minutes to reach it, and Matt kept expecting an ambush around every corner.

"Be prepared for a fight," Alex had said. "There are guards there at all times, and they probably have reinforcements tonight."

When they finally pulled into view of the gate, Matt gasped. The gate was made up of a large gap in a wall, which was made entirely of barbed-wire fence, with wooden supports. It stretched all away around the perimeter of the town. There were wooden towers on either side of the gate, with guards posted on top. Lying in wait for them were two cars; one of them was a brand-new Porsche. Matt guessed that was Carlton's. Men surrounded the two vehicles.

But that was nothing compared to what else he saw. All of the men were shooting something on the other side of the gate, and when he saw what it was, he froze up.

Beyond the gate was a massive horde of zombies.

Trent had seen it too. "Oh shit," he said. "The gunfire and explosions must have attracted them."

"I have an idea," said Alex. He turned to Shade, and said, "Get down. Don't let them see you."

Shade nodded and disappeared. Alex then stuck his head through the opening and addressed the others. "Don't come out until we say so," said Alex. "We're going to try to pretend we're on their side."

"We are?" asked Matt.

"Yeah," said Alex. "They're busy now. They won't have time to ask questions. And then we'll come up with an excuse to leave, or fight them if we have to."

Trent was nodding. "Sounds good."

Matt considered. "Yep. Let's do it."

They got closer, and some of the soldiers turned to look at them. But they did nothing except continue to shoot at the zombies.

They pulled up next to the Porsche. Matt opened the door and got out of the car, only to be greeted by Carlton.

"Did you get the prisoners?" he asked, assuming they were soldiers from the warehouse.

"Yeah," Matt lied. "They're dead."

"What about their Beast?"

"Wellâ€¦ We killed it. They somehow slipped through our lines and let it out. It killed a lot of us."

Carlton looked over the three of them. "Are you all that's left?"

"Everyone else is dead or wounded."

Carlton looked at the ground in exasperation. "Fuck," he cursed. "Alright, help us out here."

Matt nodded, and the three of them got to work. They began shooting at the zombies on the other side of the gate. Matt shot down a whole line of them, making sure to aim for the head.

A couple of minutes in, a man called down from the guard tower on the right. "Sir!"

"What?" Carlton yelled back.

"There's too many of them! They're pushing through!"

Sure enough, the zombie frontline had pushed forward in the past couple minutes.

"How?" Carlton asked.

"I don't know! But I've never seen this many before! We have to fall back!"

Carlton considered, and then groaned. "Fine!" he yelled. "Get down from there! We'll call for reinforcements!"

Matt, Alex, Trent, and the soldiers kept shooting, while the guards came down from their towers. They jogged over to the cars, shooting at the zombies behind them while they were doing so.

"Call for reinforcements," Carlton ordered one of them when they reached the cars. "Tell them to meet us half a mile up the road."

"Sir, yes sir!" the guard said. He went into his pocket and pulled out a two-way radio. He lifted it to his mouth and said, "This is Gate Watch, requesting reinforcements. There's a massive zombie horde

attacking the front gates. Someone meet us half a mile back.
Over."

Matt hadn't moved very far from Carlton, so he stopped shooting for a moment to listen to the reply.

"__Negative!"_ it came. _"They're all over the place! There's been fires all along the wall on the Lyndrich border, and the gate's been bashed down in places! They've broken through!"_

"WHAT?" Carlton practically screamed. "HOW?"

"Shit!" the guard said into the radio. "Do you know how it happened?"

"__We have a witness. She claims she saw the Man in Black in the woods."_

By this point, Carlton's face had turned to such a deep shade of red that if Matt didn't know better, he would've guessed that he had a major sunburn. "That meddling, good-for-nothing, sonuvawhore BASTARD!" Carlton shouted, screaming the curse. "He's gone too far this time, and he'll pay. Mark my words, he'll regret this."

"Sir, should we go back to town?" asked the guard.

Carlton shook his head. "No. Gunnerville is lost. We need to leave, now."

"But-"

"NO 'BUTS'" Carlton shouted. "WE ARE LEAVING!"

"O-o-okay, sir." The guard opened the passenger's seat of the Porsche and got in. Carlton got in the driver's seat, and everyone else managed to squeeze in the other car, a big gray Ford truck, a 4X4 like the others.

Matt nodded at Alex and Trent, and they went back to the van. He got in the front seat, and turned the ignition.

By this point, the zombies had almost reached the cars. Suddenly, Carlton revved his Porsche, and then put it into drive. He turned towards the gate, and shot out, crushing zombies and leaving broken, bloody corpses in his wake.

The truck followed him, and Matt followed the truck. Trent turned around to the opening, and said, "Hang on, folks! It's gonna be a bumpy ride!"

Matt reached the zombies and started running them over. The bumps were huge, and Matt almost flew out of his seat several times. From the back, he could hear all kinds of thumps as the rest of the group was thrown around each other.

A few times some zombies would come too close to a window. When that happened, Alex or Trent would put a bullet between their eyes. In fact, they did it even if they didn't get too close.

They kept this up for several minutes, heading in the general

direction of Lyndrich, before they finally reached the edge of the horde. They were driving through forest now, making tight turns all over the place and getting the exterior of the van scratched up. Finally, the convoy stopped.

Matt saw the soldiers getting out of their cars, and decided to see what was wrong. He pulled up next to Carlton's Porsche and killed the engine.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Those damn zombies popped my tires," said Carlton. "And the cars are too big to get through here. I'm sorry to say it, but we'll have to leave the cars behind. Damn shame. Such a nice Porsche."

"Shit," said Matt. "Oh well." He gave Alex a glance that said, _what about the others?_

Alex shrugged. _I don't know. We'll think of something._

Trent, however, had an idea. He got out of the car, and motioned for the others to do the same. Then, he walked over to a couple of the soldiers.

"Hey, we've got some extra guns and ammo in the trunk. Want to take a look?"

The two soldiers looked at each other, and then looked back at Trent. "Sure," they said. They walked over to the back of the van, and Trent walked over to the side. Casually, he rapped his knuckles against the side three times, hoping that the others would get the message.

One of the two soldiers grabbed the van's back door handle and pulled it open, saying, "Let's see what you got in he- What the fuck?!"

Those were his last words. As soon as he opened the door, those inside opened fire on them. They were dead in seconds.

"Jesus Christ!" yelled another soldier. Matt, Trent and Alex ran around to the other side of the van, getting ready for a fight.

One by one, the others jumped out of the van and took cover behind it as well. The soldiers had started firing at them, and they started firing back.

"I should have known!" Carlton yelled. "You'll pay for this!"

Matt turned around the van and shot out, hitting the soldier next to Carlton in the arm.

Suddenly, a loud roar echoed through the night, and Shade jumped out of the back. Using what little energy he had left, he produced a fireball and shot it at Carlton's Porsche.

Seeing the ball of fire coming his way, Carlton had just enough time to duck behind a tree and avoid getting killed. Very few of his men were as lucky. Two thirds of his soldiers were killed in the explosion.

When it was safe, Carlton looked out from behind the tree and saw his Porsche in ruins. "My Porsche!" he yelled. "My beautiful Porsche!"

He surveyed the battle, and realized it was hopeless. They were going to lose. To make matters worse, the zombies had reached the battlefield.

I have to leave, he thought. _It's the only way I'll get out of this alive_.

And so he turned and ran into the forest.

"Zombies!" Lucas yelled.

Trent turned his head and saw that the huge zombie horde was now making its way into the middle of their battlefield. Then, something else caught his attention.

Carlton. He had survived the explosion.

He stared, dumbfounded, at the wreckage, before his face contorted into one of rage. He said something- Trent didn't know what- and paused for a moment, before turning around and running into the woods.

"Oh no you don't," said Trent.

He ran across the battlefield, shooting at the soldiers as he went by. In all the confusion, nobody on his side noticed him leaving, until he plunged into the cover of the trees after Carlton.

There's too many of them, Matt thought.

"We need to get out of here!" he yelled, just before Shade shot his last shot at the truck. There was a huge explosion, and zombies and more soldiers were killed. He risked a glance and saw that there were only three soldiers left. As he watched, it was reduced to two as a zombie caught up with one and started tearing into his throat.

Matt lifted his gun and shot another one down. One left.

The last bullets were fired by Alena. The last soldier fell to his knees, with a hole in his head, and died.

"Let's go!" yelled Alex.

"Wait!" said Matt. "Is everyone here?"

"We don't have time!" yelled Alex, shooting another zombie.

Matt ignored him, and began counting heads. Eight of them.

Someone was missing.

"Where's Trent?" he asked.

"He'sâ€¦ Shit! I don't know!" said Jeremy.

Trent raced through the underbrush after Carlton, unaware that he was

traveling deeper and deeper into Lyndrich. He knew Carlton was up ahead; could hear him.

Suddenly, they came into a clearing. Trent saw Carlton on the other side, and lifted his gun. "Carlton!" he yelled, shooting at his feet. "End of the line!"

Carlton stopped, startled, and turned around, his gun drawn. He face was wearing an expression of pure hatred.

"You," he said. "You've ruined _everything!_ Everything I've worked for is _destroyed!_"

"Yes," Trent agreed. "Yes it is. And you are too. So just give up."

Carlton shook his head. "Never. This isn't the last you've seen of me. I'll be back one day, and I'll make you pay. I'll make _all _of you pay. And it'll all be on you."

"Nay, amigo," said a new voice from behind Carlton. A voice Trent recognized. "This one's on you."

In a split second, a large blade cut clean through Carlton's throat. His eyes widened, and his mouth opened in an expression of shock. He tried to say something, but all that came out were a series of choked gurgles.

The blade retracted, and blood started pouring out of the hole. Carlton fell to his knees, and then went face first into the ground.

Behind him was the Man in Black.

"So, Trent," he said. "We meet again. But not how I expected."

Trent gulped. "How do you know my name?" he asked.

"I have my ways," the Man in Black explained. "I was surprised when I found out it was you. What are the odds?"

"Yeah," said Trent. "What are they?"

The Man in Black turned around and looked at Carlton's body. "I suppose I should thank you for helping me with him," he said. "I didn't want to kill him, but he left me no choice. Maybe now that he's gone, this whole thing can endâ€¦" he trailed off, and spaced out for a moment. Then, he shook himself back to reality.

"Tell me, how does someone like you get involved with someone like him?" he asked.

"They ambushed us in the woods and took us prisoner. Thought we were with you. They tortured us, and were going to execute us. They would've, if we hadn't found some traitors in their midst."

The Man in Black nodded. "Carlton was the kind of man who could have many enemies, and few friends. He didn't belong in this world."

He turned around and looked at Trent. "You've been looking for me,

haven't you?"

Trent said nothing.

"Why?"

"I need that flash drive."

"The flash drive? What is so important about that?"

"Everything!" Trent was starting to lose his temper. "Everything I've been working to accomplish is in that flash drive, and you took it away!"

The Man in Black was silent for a moment. Then, he said, "Now you know what it feels like. I'm giving you an hour to get out of my town. If you're still here, we'll come after you."

He started walking away. "Hey!" Trent yelled. "Come back here!"

The Man in Black kept walking. Enraged, Trent ran after him, yelling, "Give me my flash drive!"

The Man in Black whirled around and punched him in the gut, and then kicked him to the ground. He leaned over him, and said, "This is your last chance. Stay away from us, or suffer the consequences."

He straightened up, turned around, and walked away, disappearing into the trees.

* * *

><p>So, next chapter will be on WEDNESDAY! NOT next Sunday!

Also, there are four more chapters in part one. The finale is approaching! What will happen? Keep reading to find out!

24. Chapter Twenty-Three: Norbury

So, here is the next chapter! I don't really have much to say before this one, so I'll just say I hope you enjoy it!

* * *

><p>Chapter Twenty-Three:

Norbury

Just outside Gunnerville, New Hampshire

"It's been ten minutes!" yelled Alex. "We can't hold them off for much longer!"

"What are we supposed to do?" Matt asked. He paused to shoot a zombie that was creeping up on them. "Leave him behind?"

Suddenly, movement in the woods caught his eye. He turned and saw Trent emerging from the trees.

"There he is!" Matt yelled. "Come on, Trent!"

Trent heard him and ran across the battlefield to the van. "What happened?" asked Matt.

"Long story," said Trent. "Let's just please get the fuck out of here."

"That is the single best idea I've heard all night," said Samantha, who was clutching her bleeding right arm.

"Harristown should be this way!" yelled Joey, walking in a direction perpendicular to the one Trent ran in. "You all coming?"

"Hell yeah," said Ben. "I'm just about done with this shit."

A couple hours later, they had crossed the border of Norbury. They hadn't been able to take the van because they wouldn't have been able to drive it through the woods. So they walked.

Matt felt like his feet were about to fall off. He was exhausted, and wanted nothing more than to sleep. Next to him, Shade could barely keep up. The pain had gotten worse for him. They were walking next to Samantha, who was also walking slowly. In front of them, Trent was helping Lucas walk.

"How are you holding up?" Matt asked Samantha.

"Fine," she said through gritted teeth. "Considering I've been shot in the arm and now have to hike all the way home."

"Hey, look on the bright side. You're not Lucas."

"I heard that!" Lucas yelled. "Dick!"

Matt ignored him, and Samantha chuckled a bit, despite herself. Matt turned to Shade and asked, "How about you?"

The dragon's eyes were glazed over with pain, but he was still able to walk. He nodded weakly.

"Okay," said Matt. "As soon as we get back I'll give you some medicine."

They walked in silence for several more minutes, before suddenly Shade stopped short, his ears pricked.

The others stopped in their tracks and looked at him in confusion. "What's wrong?" Matt asked.

Shade stared into the trees and started growling.

"What is it?"

Suddenly, the sound of a branch cracking came from behind them. Matt whirled around to see what it was, and saw nothing. But

He felt like he was being watched.

"Didâ€¦ Did anybody else hear that?" he asked.

Alena nodded. "I did," she replied.

"What-"

"DON'T MOVE!" a voice boomed from the direction Shade was looking in. Everyone instinctively reached for their guns, and a shot was fired from the other direction. It didn't hit anybody, but it got the message across.

"Fuck me in the ass!" Ben complained. "Can this night possibly get any worse?"

"Put your hands up!" the voice commanded. Matt cautiously lifted his hands above his head, and the rest of them did the same. Next to him, he could hear Shade growling. "Go along with it," he whispered. "We have no idea how many there are."

As if reading his mind, the voice yelled, "We have you surrounded! Take off your masks!"

At first, none of them did anything. Then, Trent took off his mask with his good hand and dropped it to the ground. Matt followed suit. Soon, one by one, they all had their masks on the ground.

"Now, all of you put your guns on the ground behind you and face me!" the voice commanded. "Try anything and we'll blow you all to hell!"

There was something about that voiceâ€¦ Something Matt recognized. But he didn't have time to think about it. Instead, he did as he was told and put his gun on the ground, and turned to face the voice.

"Now, some of my friends are going to take your guns!" the voice announced. "Cooperate, and we'll let you leave- with an escort, that is! And don't even think about trying to get thatâ€¦ whatever that thing is to help! We'll just shoot it before it can do any real damage!"

Shade growled, his ears pressed flat against his head.

"We're just passing through!" Trent protested. "Why can't you just escort us out now?"

"Because first of all, we don't trust you, and second of all, we need more guns!" the voice replied. "Now cooperate, or I swear I'll shoot you where you stand!"

Behind him, Matt heard footsteps. Shade let out a slight growl, but otherwise stayed still.

"You're just a fucking asshole, aren't you?" asked Ben.

"Shut up!" said the voice. Then, after a moment's hesitation, it asked, "Do I know you?"

"I don't know," said Ben. "Do you?"

"I swear I know you from somewhere" | "

Then, from behind them, there was another voice. This one was unmistakable. Matt knew who it was.

"Ben?" the voice asked. "Is that you?"

Ben seemed to recognize the voice too. "Jean?" he asked.
"Jean-Christophe?"

"Holy shit!" Jean exclaimed. "It is you!"

"Ben?" asked the other voice. "Holy fuck!" there were more footsteps, and a teen dressed in army camo emerged from the trees. Matt recognized him instantly; it was Kody, yet another friend from Before.

"Kody?" Matt asked, shocked.

"This night just took a huge turn for the awesome," Joey commented.

Matt took a chance and stepped forward to greet his old friend. Kody instinctively raised his gun, but then relaxed it when he realized who it was. "Matt?" he asked, shocked. "Jeez, who else is here?"

"Joey, Brian, Alex and Jeremy," said Matt.

"Holy shit!" Jean commented. "I can't believe you're all still alive!"

"How _did _you all survive?" asked Kody.

"It's a long story," Brian replied.

"Well, you should come back to our place," Kody suggested. "Andrew and Anthony will be happy to see you."

"What?" Ben almost yelled. "_Anthony?_ He's _alive?_"

"Yeah," Kody replied. "He barely made it past Z-Day, but he did."

"I thought he was dead" | "

While they were busy getting re-acquainted with their friends, others in the group were more hesitant. Trent, Lucas and Samantha felt awkward, as they had no idea who these newcomers were. Alena, being the distrusting girl she was, thought it was suspicious.

"Does anyone else think this is crazy?" she asked.

They stopped talking and stared at her. "Who're you?" asked Kody.

Alena ignored his question, and said, "We were just getting held up, and now we're all friends? I'm sorry, but did I miss something?"

"Don't worry, Alena," Joey reassured. "They're friends. We knew them

from Before."

"Okay!" said Alena, still unconvinced. "But if we get captured again- or worse- it's not my fault."

Meanwhile, Shade had been watching the whole affair silently. The shock of seeing their friends again had caused Kody and Jean to forget about him, but not for long. He decided to introduce himself, and walked forward. He walked forward to Jean, who was facing away from him, and lifted a claw, tapping him on the shoulder.

"What?" asked Jean. He turned around, and jumped back in shock when he saw who it was. "Oh shit! I forgot about you!"

Kody looked over and was startled as well. "What the fuck _is _that?"

"He," Matt corrected.

"Whatever," said Kody. "What is? Wait, that's that's a Night Fury!"

"Annnnnnd we have a winner!" Ben yelled, mocking an announcer's voice.

Matt introduced the two of them to Shade, and then to Trent, Lucas, Samantha and Alena. Once greetings were given, Kody asked them a question.

"You guys look like you've been through Hell," he observed. "Those are nasty wounds you've got. Where are you staying?"

"In Harristown," Brian replied. "We've been walking for hours."

"That's a long way off," Kody stated. "Our place is closer. Want to come by? We have medicine, and plenty of room."

The group looked around at each other, seeing if any of them had any problems with it. There were no objections.

"Sure," said Trent. "We'd love to."

"Okay," said Kody. "Follow me."

"Wait," said Matt. "Didn't you have us surrounded?"

Kody shook his head. "No. We were bluffing. I was convincing though, wasn't I?"

Kody and Jean led them through the woods into the heart of Norbury. They were moving much slower now, as they were nearing the end of their ropes. Especially those who were wounded.

Shade was the worst off. He needed painkillers, and he needed them badly. The pain was becoming almost unbearable. Samantha, Lucas and Ben were doing badly as well, although trying to give it their all.

When they were about a minute away from their destination, Kody

announced, "We're almost there."

"Thank God," said Joey. "I'm not walking again for a week."

Matt was walking next to Shade, who was leaning against him slightly for support. Despite his huge weight, Matt was able to manage.

"How're you holding up?" he asked.

Shade wasn't holding up well at all. But he knew relief was close. He nodded, signaling he was okay.

"Hey, Jean," Matt called. "Do you have any painkillers? Vicodins, maybe?"

"I think soâ€¦" Jean replied. "I don't know if we have Vicodin, but we definitely have painkillers. Why?"

"Shade. He needs them. It's a long story."

"Here it is!" Kody announced.

They looked ahead and saw a large house. At first, it didn't look like much, but closer examination revealed it to be heavily fortified. The windows were barred, and the door was reinforced with metal. A barbed-wire fence surrounded the property.

"Wow, you really jacked this place up," Joey commented.

"Wait until you see the inside," said Kody.

They walked to a door in the gate, and Kody opened it. Once they were all inside, Jean shut and locked it.

Kody led them to a back door and knocked three times. There was a moment of silence, and then a muffled voice asked, "Who is it?"

"Kody and Jean," Kody replied. "With some guests."

There was a fumbling noise, and then the door opened slightly, held by a chain. A face peered out, and Matt recognized it as belonging to Andrew, his old friend.

"Who...?" He trailed off as he saw them. "Joey? Matt? Ben? Alex? The rest of you? You're alive?"

"Yes, they are," Kody replied. "Now, please let us in."

The door shut, and there were more fumbling noises. Then, the door opened all the way and Andrew stepped outside. His whole body was revealed to them. He was of about average height, with short, reddish hair and glasses. He had once been somewhat overweight, but, like Matt, he had lost it in the previous months. "Come in," he said.

As they walked in, he noticed Trent, Lucas, Samantha and Alena, who he didn't recognize. "Who're they?" he asked.

"Friends," Matt replied. "They joined us along the way."

"Oh, okay." He was about to close the door, when he saw Shade. "Holy

fuck!" he yelled. "What is _that_?"

"That's my friend Shade," Matt replied. "He's a Night Fury."

"Heâ€¦ He's a what?" Andrew asked, shocked.

"Are you going to let him in, or what?" Matt asked.

After a moment's hesitation, Andrew stepped aside, and allowed Shade to squeeze through. Then, he shut the door and bolted it shut with a long, metal plank.

Jean and Kody removed the helmets they had been wearing, and their faces were revealed. Both were about average in height, and skinny. Kody had shortish black hair, and his face was covered in freckles, while his skin was somewhat tan except for a splotchy area under his chin which was pale due to a skin condition. Jean had short, dark brown hair and glasses.

The house they were in was impressive. It was three stories tall, with many different rooms. Every room on the bottom floor had a machine gun sticking out the window, and Matt could only assume there were more upstairs. Ammo lined the walls as well.

"Yeah," he said. "You need guns, alright."

"Hey, we didn't want you to come back and shoot us," Kody explained. "Had we known it was you, we wouldn't have tried that in the first place."

"Can you take them to the medicine room?" Jean asked. "They have wounded."

"Sure" said Andrew. "Who needs treatment?"

"Shade," said Matt. "He needs painkillers."

"I'm not even going to ask," Andrew replied. "Anyone else?"

Ben, Samantha and Lucas stepped forward. Andrew saw their wounds and grimaced. "Ouch," he said. "Okay, follow me."

He led the four of them out. Matt decided to go with them, so as to stay with Shade. They followed him up a flight of stairs and down a hallway to a door. "Anthony!" Andrew yelled. "We have visitors and need drugs!"

"You put _Anthony _in charge of the drugs?" Matt asked.

"No," Andrew replied. "His weed stash is in there, and tonight's a smoking night apparently."

"How the fuck did you get weed?" asked Lucas.

"Weed!" Ben exclaimed.

They all gave him strange looks. "You need help," Samantha commented.

"Tell me about it."

The door opened to a large room with drawers everywhere and a sink in one corner. Anthony was standing in front of them, smoke coming off of his body, and a joint in his fingers.

"Who's-" he was cut off as he saw Ben and Matt. "Ben? Matt? How- What the fuck is that?" he asked when he saw Shade.

"Wellâ€¦ About thatâ€¦" said Andrew. "That's â€¦ Night Furyâ€¦"

Anthony looked at his joint, then back at Shade. With one flick, he tossed the joint into the air. Ben reached up and caught it. "Yes!" he exclaimed. Anthony stormed past them towards the stairs. "KODY!" he yelled. "HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TO LEAVE MY GOD DAMN WEED ALONE!"

"Wellâ€¦" said Andrew. "Now that that's done, let's get you that medicine."

They followed him into the room, and he began searching through the drawers. "What do you all need?" he asked.

"Shade needs Vicodins, and everyone else needs treatment for gunshot wounds," said Matt. "I'm fine."

Andrew grimaced. "Shit. I hate treating gunshots." He picked up a bottle of pills and tossed it to Matt. "I can't find any Vicodins, but I have Percocet's. They should have the same effect."

"Thanks," Matt said. He opened the bottle and shook out four pills. "This might be a little too much, but I think you need them," Matt explained to Shade. He held out his hand to him.

The dragon nodded, his shoulder and spine burning with pain. He shakily bent his head down and lapped up the pills, swallowing them greedily.

"Alright," said Matt. "You should probably go lie down."

Shade nodded, and walked back into the hall, curling up in the middle of the floor. Matt walked over to him and laid a hand reassuringly in his neck. "Thanks for helping us back there," he said. "I'm sorry I let this happen to you."

Shade looked at him in a way that said all was forgiven, and gave him a slight grin. Matt smiled, and returned to the others.

Andrew was cleaning Ben's hand. The bleeding had, for the most part, stopped, but the wound was still open and dirty. He had run it under water from the sink, and was now rubbing anti-septic into it.

"How do you know so much about medicine?" asked Matt curiously.

"Well, in a zombie apocalypse, you kind of need to know these things," Andrew replied. He finished applying the anti-septic, and started wrapping Ben's hand in gauze.

"It's nice to see you again, Andrew," he said.

Andrew paused for a moment, and looked at him. "Same for you," he said. "I never thought I would."

"So, how many more of you are there?" Matt asked.

"What do you mean?" Andrew responded.

"Like, how many more of you live here?"

"Oh, it's just the four of us. There was a military encampment in town after Z-Day, and we found lots of explosives we started using as traps. That, plus camouflage, makes us do a lot more damage than you'd think."

He finished wrapping Ben's hand and gave him some pills for infections. Then, he let him go.

Ben went downstairs to reunite with his friends. He especially needed to talk to Anthony.

"Anthony!" he yelled when he got downstairs.

"Ben!" his friend exclaimed back. "I can't believe you're alive!"

"Me neither!" Ben replied. "What happened, man?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I thought you were following me! But you just disappeared! I thought you were dead!"

"Ohâ€|" Anthony paused, trying to remember. "I was right behind you almost the whole time. It was around Brown Hill Road where it happened. I was driving, and suddenly a group of zombies came out of nowhere. I swerved to avoid them, lost control, and crashed. I was knocked out, and would've died if some cops hadn't come by and saved me at the last moment. But by that time you were long gone."

"Damnitâ€|" Ben trailed off. "I should've looked back. I'm sorry."

Anthony clapped him on the shoulder. "Don't worry about it. I'm alive, so you're off the hook."

Just then, Matt came down, with Samantha and Shade right behind him. Shade was feeling a little better at this point, and was able to walk. "Holy fuck! It's real!" Anthony yelled when he saw Shade.

After the four of them finally got used to Shade, they spent a while re-acquainting with their friends. They each told their story- or, that is, all of it they wanted to tell.

"Holy shit!" Kody exclaimed. "Gunnerville's gone? Carlton's dead?"

"Pretty much," said Ben. "But they took my finger with them."

"Thank God!" said Andrew. "They were turning into a real pain in the ass for us."

But it was getting late, and it was well past midnight anyway. Most of them wanted to sleep.

"You're welcome to stay the night here," Kody offered. "You'd need to borrow sleeping bags and sleep in the living room, but other than that there's no problem."

The group took them up on their offer. Kody, Jean, Andrew and Anthony all went to their bedrooms upstairs, while the others found sleeping bags in a closet and set them up in the living room.

Matt picked out a spot in the corner, leaving just enough room for Shade next to him. He got into the sleeping bag, not even bothering to take off his clothes, and waited for everyone else to settle down.

Shade curled up next to him and draped his wing over him, giving him warmth. "Goodnight, Shade," Matt mumbled, drifting off incredibly fast. The dragon grunted in return, but by then, Matt was asleep.

The next morning, the group had a discussion over breakfast. Andrew, on the behalf of his friends, had invited them to stay for good. After some discussion, the group decided to accept his offer. Most of them trusted these people; they were friends. And this new house was not only bigger, but also more fortified than their house in Harristown.

That left one problem, however. They needed their supplies.

A team was organized to get them back. Ben, Lucas and Samantha were all wounded, and in need of rest, so they stayed behind. Plus, they needed guards, in case a horde of zombies came. Or worse; survivors from Gunnerville. Wounded couldn't protect themselves.

Matt, Shade and Trent volunteered to stay. Seeing as a dragon made the best possible guard, nobody argued, except Kody at first. "Couldn't he help carry us there and back?" he asked. "We could get there a lot quicker."

Matt shook his head. "He can't carry that much weight. I'm sorry."

Andrew volunteered to stay as well. They needed someone who knew the house and the area near it. Finally, Alena volunteered as well, to stay with Samantha.

"So it's settled then," said Kody. "Me, Jean, Anthony, Joey, Brian, Alex and Jeremy will go."

"Fuck yeah," said Jean.

After breakfast, the team left for Harristown, and Ben began wandering around the house in boredom. _I wish I had my iPod_, he thought. _I'm going through music withdrawal_. _He couldn't help but chuckle a little bit at the thought.

He found himself in the kitchen. _I wonder if they have any alcohol_, he thought. He opened the fridge, and his mood instantly improved when he saw they did, in fact, have some vodka.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, pumping his fist in excitement, despite the sharp pain this action caused his hand. He grabbed a bottle, shut the fridge door, and sat down at the table.

As he was opening the bottle, he heard someone enter the room. Looking up, he saw that it was Alena.

"Hey," he said. Then, a rare thing happened. His inner gentleman took over. He held the bottle out and asked, "Want any?"

She shook her head and sat down, staring off into space.

"What's up?" he asked.

She said nothing at first. Just when Ben thought she was ignoring him, she spoke.

"Can you look me in the eye right now," she said. "And tell me these people can be trusted?"

Ben looked her in the eyes and said, "Yes."

She sighed, and looked down at the table. "And now my mind is going to start telling me that you can't be trusted either. That I just met you." She clenched her hand into a fist and slowly brought it down on the table. "I'm sorry. I have severe trust issues. I had a rough childhood, andâ€¦" she shook her head. "I should probably leave."

She got up to go, but Ben motioned for her to stay. "You don't have to. Do you want to talk about it?"

"No," she said. "It's best if I don't."

Ben nodded in understanding. Then, he held out the vodka bottle. "Well, at least have a sip. You look like you need it."

She chuckled at that, then caved in. "Fine," she said, and took the bottle. After taking a long, deep swig, she handed it back to him.

For the next hour or so, they drank together, and talked. For the first time since Ben had met her, Alena actually seemed friendly. They talked about whatever came to their minds. And afterwards, even when her old, mistrusting demeanor was back, Ben could still tell that something had changed between them.

Around that same time, Samantha was wandering through the house as well. She was looking for Matt. Before they were attacked by Carlton's men, he had been about to tell her something, but wasn't able to. Now, she was going to find out what that was.

She walked into the kitchen and saw Ben and Alena talking and drinking what smelled strongly like vodka. They both looked up at her when she walked in.

"Have either of you seen Matt?" she asked.

They shook their heads. "No," said Ben. "Sorry."

Samantha left them, and went to look for him elsewhere. Her arm started to throb again, as it did on and off, despite the painkillers she had been given. She had never been shot before, and she never wanted to be again. It hurt like hell.

She finally found him in the living room, sitting on the couch next to Shade and talking with Andrew. "Matt," she said. "I need to talk to you."

Matt stared at her. "Okay," he said.

Samantha glanced at Andrew. "Alone," she said.

Andrew got the hint and stood up. "Okay," he said. "I'll leave you two."

He left the room, and Matt glanced at Shade. "Is it okay if he stays?"

"Of course," Samantha replied. She sat down next to him on the couch and patted Shade's neck. The dragon nudged her face in greeting.

"So what do you want to talk about?" asked Matt.

"I need to know what you were going to tell me. Before we were attacked."

"What?" Matt tried to remember what they had been talking about. Then, it came to him. "Oh, right. I had forgotten about that." He turned to her. "Are you sure you want to hear this? It won't answer questions, it'll just raise more."

Samantha nodded. "Yes. I need to know. I don't care what it is."

Matt sighed. "Okay," he said. He reached into his mind and tried to find where to begin. "I think it was around three or four years ago," he recalled. "We were sophomores, so it couldn't have been more than that. Anyway, we had this friend named Sam. I was friends with him since third grade, and knew him all the way up until Z-day. He moved to Vermont that same year, but we kept in touch."

"Anyway, Sam was amazing at drawing. He could draw pretty much anything he set his mind to, and they would always come out incredible. He taught me a few things, actually. I ended up drawing too. I was okay, but never as good as him."

"He especially loved to draw dragons and Pok  mon. They were basically his two favorite things. His favorite Pok  mon was Swampert, and his most prized Pok  mon in his game was his shiny Swampert. He loved How to Train Your Dragon as well."

Samantha became more and more awestruck. This Sam person was exactly like her. And there was more; she knew it. And she was a little frightened by it.

Matt saw her face, and knew what she was thinking. He stopped for a moment, and asked, "Do you want me to continue?"

"Yes," she said without hesitation.

"Okayâ€¦ Well, he got the idea one day to make a PokÃ©mon graphic novel, and put alter-egos of a bunch of his friends- including me- in it. He created one for himself as well; one he would use many more times in the future, in drawings, RP's, things like that."

He took a deep breath and looked her in the eye. "His alter ego was a girl named Samantha White. She was exactly like you."

If Samantha had been standing up, she wouldn't have been for long. She had had some idea of where his story was going, but even still the truth hit her hard. And it scared her.

"Howâ€¦" she trailed off. "How does that happen? It can't be a coincidence. It's too big."

"That's what I've been trying to figure out," he said. "And there's more, too, if you want to hear it."

Oh Godâ€¦ she thought. "I want to," she said.

"Those names that were in your headâ€¦ What were they again?"

"Jack, Lily, and Elizabeth."

Matt nodded. Those were the names of three of his signature PokÃ©mon. Jack was a shiny Chandelure, Lily was a Galvantula, and Elizabeth was a Scrafty."

By this point, Samantha was absolutely speechless. He was right; this didn't answer questions. It only raised more. But as she continued down this train of thought, she realized that now she had something she didn't have before: a lead.

"I've heard you talking about him before," she said. "Do you know if he's alive?"

Matt exhaled, thinking. "I don't know," he said. "He survived Z-Day, I know that. From what I hear, the last time he was seen was in Lyndrich, before the Man in Black showed up."

She stood up. "I need to go there, then," she announced.

Matt and Shade stood up after her. "What?" he asked. "Are you _crazy_? That's The Man in Black's territory! You heard what he's capable of!"

"I don't care," Samantha said. "It's my only chance. If you won't go, I'm sure Trent would like to." She pushed by him and headed towards the door.

"Wait!" Matt called.

She stopped and turned around. "What?" she asked.

He couldn't let her go alone. Even if she was with Trent, it wasn't safe. Right then, he knew they needed him and Shade with them if there was any hope of them making it out alive.

"We'll go with you," he said. "Me and Shade."

Shade glared at him, his eyes saying something along the lines of, _Whoa, what now? When did we decide this?_

Samantha nodded. "Thanks," she said. "I'll go see if Trent is interested."

She left the room, and Matt and Shade were alone. Matt turned to his dragon friend, only to be met by an angry glare. "What?" he asked.

Shade responded by whacking him in the face with his tail.

"Ow!" he protested. "I'm sorry! Did you want her to die?"

Later on, Alena had left Ben alone in the kitchen. Minutes later, Trent walked in and sat down next to him. "I need to talk to you," he said.

"What the hell is this, talk with Ben day?" Ben asked.

"This is serious."

"Okay, what's up?" Ben took a swig of vodka.

"I'm going to Lyndrich tomorrow."

Ben immediately spat the vodka out, coughing. "I'm sorry," he said. "What was that?"

"I said, I'm going to Lyndrich tomorrow," Trent repeated.

Ben put the bottle back down on the table and stared at him for a moment. "So, what, you're insane now?" he asked.

"No," Trent replied. "I'm as sane as ever."

"Why? Why would you go there?"

"I need that flash drive back," said Trent. "It's the only thing that matters anymore."

"Okay, here's a question then," said Ben. "We have a laptop. Why didn't you just put the files on that? We wouldn't have this problem then."

"I tried," Trent replied. "But there was so much stuff on it, and not enough space left in the computer's hard drive."

"Ohâ€¦ Sorry," said Ben. "But don't you have the important details memorized or something?"

"_Everything_ was an important detail," Trent explained. "I need it back. It's the only way."

Ben sighed, and took another swig of vodka. "You say you're doing this because you want to make a difference. But have you ever considered that maybe, just maybe, you weren't _meant _to?"

"Yes," he replied. "But I have to try."

"Why? Why is making a difference so important to you?"

"It isn't!" Trent was practically shouting now. "It never was!"

Both of them were silent for a moment. In that silence, it all became clear to Ben. Trent had never been trying to 'make a difference.' That had just been a cover story. His real motives had been ones he had been trying to bury away.

"Then why are you going after him?" asked Ben.

Trent looked down at the table, and was silent for a moment. Studying his face closely, Ben noticed a tear forming in his eye.

He finally spoke. "I watched my wife and daughter die right in front of me," he said. "All of my friends were devoured. I swore from that day forward that I would avenge them. Even if it killed me. He has the flash drive, and I think he knows where this thing is as well."

Ben was silent, pondering that. "So this is about revenge?" he asked.

"You could call it that."

There was no arguing with that. In one last futile attempt to persuade him otherwise, Ben said, "Trent, think. This is your life we're talking about here."

"And I'd gladly give it away for this," Trent replied.

"You can't go by yourself."

"I'm not. Matt, Shade and Samantha are coming with me."

Ben reminded himself to punch Matt later. He also realized that they would need all the help they could get, even with Shade.

"I'll come too," he said.

Trent shook his head. "You're wounded," he said.

"Fuck that. I've come this far with you; I'm not just staying behind because of a missing finger."

Trent was silent for a moment. Then, he said, "Fine. We're leaving at ten o'clock tomorrow. Make sure you're ready by then."

At that, he stood up and left the room.

Shade was alone.

Matt had gone off to find a way to use the bathroom, leaving Shade in the living room momentarily. The Night Fury was still irritated at

being unwillingly volunteered for what he considered to be a suicide mission, but it was masked slightly by the fact that he would have volunteered anyway. Matt was right; they needed him.

Suddenly, he felt a strange presence in the room.

He looked up, expecting to see someone, but nothing was there. But something wasn't right. He felt watched.

A strange scent hung in the air, a scent unlike anything Shade had ever encountered before. And it was coming from the door.

Something was there. Shade knew it. He growled, and raised his hind legs in his hunting crouch.

Whatever it was left. But Shade had a feeling that it would be back.

Later that day, the party that had been sent out returned with all of their supplies. It was almost dark, so they started a fire and ate dinner around it. Using a special technique involving evaporation, Jean purified some water they had found in a river nearby and served it to everyone along with some canned food.

While they were eating, Trent told them the plans they had made to go to Lyndrich. At first, everyone stared at him in silence. Then Alex started laughing.

"That's a good one, dude," he said.

"I'm serious," said Trent.

"Are you insane?"

"No."

"Why the fuck would you go there?" asked Jeremy.

"I need to find the Man in Black. He and I have an unfinished business," Trent explained. "And before you try to talk me out of this, let me tell you that nothing you say will change my mind."

Alex looked down and sighed. "I can't believe I'm doing this," he muttered. "I'm coming with you. I've had more experience with him than you. And you'll need help."

"I'll come too," said Jeremy. "You need all the guns you can get. Even with Shade."

There was silence for a moment, as everyone pondered what to do. Most of them didn't want to go, but at the same time felt obligated to protect their friends. Finally, Brian broke the silence. "You're all crazy," he said. "But you're right. I'll come."

"Screw that, I'm staying here," said Joey. Brian turned and punched him in the arm.

"No," he said. "You're coming."

"Damn it," said Joey. "Fine."

"What's so bad about Lyndrich?" asked Kody.

Everyone stared at him. "What do you mean, 'what's so bad about it?'" asked Joey. "Isn't there a reason you live here and not there?"

Kody shrugged. "We don't go there because Carlton's men went there. We like to avoid them unless they bother us."

Alex shook his head. "We only went there a few times. There's something in there. Something huge and deadly. And it's controlled by a man who dresses in black. We don't know his name, so we call him the Man in Black."

"And someone really needs to beat his ass," Lucas pitched in. "I'm in. I'd love to be that guy."

"You can barely walk," said Trent. "You're not coming."

"Yes I am," Lucas replied. "I can use a stick or something. And besides, I've had worse."

"What are you, the Black Knight?" asked Ben.

"I did the same thing when I was shot a couple of weeks ago," Matt said.

Alena felt obligated as well. After a few moments of consideration, she turned to Samantha. "You're going, right?" she asked.

"Yeah," Samantha replied, nodding. "I found a lead."

A look of understanding passed over Alena's face. "Oh," she said. "Well, in that case, I'm coming with you."

"Well, seeing as everyone else is going, I'll go too," said Kody. "The more guns, the better."

"I'd love to go back to Lyndrich," said Andrew. "I'm in."

"And I've got nothing better to do," said Anthony.

Only Jean hadn't spoken yet. "Someone needs to guard the house, right?" he asked.

"If you want," said Kody. "From what I hear, we won't be bothered by Gunnerville for a while. And if nobody's staying, we don't need to worry about zombies; if any come, we can get rid of them when we come back."

Jean thought for a moment. Finally, he said, "It seems like I'm needed there more than I am here."

"So that's it, then?" asked Trent. "You're all coming with me?"

Everyone nodded.

"Are you sure?" He asked. "This is possibly the most dangerous thing

we've ever done."

"Just stop questioning us, before we change our minds," said Joey.

After dinner, Ben went to a private room to make his "daily" (with all that was going on, it wasn't exactly daily anymore) EOD broadcast.

"Hey everyone," he said. "This is Ben. Sorry I haven't been able to broadcast anything recently. Especially sorry if you all thought I was all dead. Assuming any of you actually bother to keep up with me.

"A lot has happened. If you're anywhere near the town of Gunnerville, I highly recommend you pack your bags and move out. We got too close, and were captured, beaten, and almost executed by a bunch of class-A assfucks led by some jackwagon named Carlton. The fuckers took my pinky and most of my nails. Don't worry; we took out Carlton in our escape. And last time we checked, Gunnerville was being invaded by a massive horde of zombies."

Ben paused for a moment while he thought of what to say next. "They might still be around, though. So keep an eye out.

"Another place I found out you don't want to go is Lyndrich. From what I hear, nobody that enters it ever comes out. Some guy who likes science got his hands on some steroids laced with crack and decided he doesn't like people. And he's not alone. He's got some friends, and based on rumors, not all of them are human either.

"A few weeks ago, I would've dismissed that as pure rumor, but based on recent events I'm not so sureâ€¦|

"Right now, we're holed up in Norbury. Not saying where. But I would stay away from here. We're with some guys that I knew from Before. They don't like strangers, but what they do like is explosives.

"I'm going to end it here for today. Tomorrow, we're going to Lyndrich. I know, I know, I just said not to go there. But Trent and our new friend Samantha decided to lead a suicide mission to find the Man in Black, as he's called. So that means I have to tag along and cover their asses.

"One more thing. If you see a guy, about 18, with longish curly brown hair and glasses, named Sam, tell him we're looking for him. Apparently one of us found out he knows something about something. And I wouldn't mind seeing him either. This is Ben, signing off. Now here's some music."

Ben connected the transmitter to his iPod, and would leave it like that until one or both ran out of batteries. Then, he left the room to go hang out with his friends.

Later that night, when Matt went to sleep, he felt more excited than he had in a long time. When he had found out The Man in Black had taken over Lyndrich, he had been greatly disappointed. But now, he was going back anyway.

Despite the danger, he was eager to get home. He almost couldn't

sleep, but he eventually did. The last thing he said to Shade was, "Goodnight, Shade. Tomorrow, we're going home."

At about the same time, Trent was in the same room Ben had been in before, this time with their laptop.

He was doing a search of all the files on it, hoping that maybe he had copied the files after all, and had forgotten about it. But he was having no luck.

He finished his second search, and had just decided to do one more, when the laptop froze up.

"The fuck?" he muttered. He tried to click something, but it wouldn't move. "Come on, don't do this to me," he groaned.

He hit the power switch, but nothing happened. Frowning, he hit it again. Nothing.

"This is fucking weird," he said to himself.

As he was making further attempts to reboot his computer, the door to the room began to creep open. All the hairs on the back of his neck stood up.

He whirled around to face it. Nobody was there, but he could feel a presence.

"Who's there?" he asked. There was no reply.

He turned back to his computer. It's nothing, he told himself. Your mind is playing tricks on you, that's all.

He felt a hand on his shoulder.

Startled, he whirled around, ready to yell at whoever it was, but stopped. There was nobody there.

"Okay, calm down," he told himself. "You need sleep. Your mind's acting up on you." He turned back to the laptop to try and turn it off again, when he froze.

The cursor was moving by itself.

Trent tried to use the touchpad, but was frozen in place with shock. Suddenly, there was a pressure on his chest, like someone was holding him into his chair. He tried to move, but couldn't.

The cursor closed down the window he was using and opened Microsoft Word. After it was done loading, the keyboard began typing by itself. Trent could hardly breathe, he was so frightened.

This is your last warning, it said. Trent didn't think it was possible, but even more chills went down his spine at that. Stay away from Lyndrich- or suffer the consequences.

Trent stared in utter shock. "You," he said. "This is your doing."

Yes, it wrote. You have no idea what I am truly capable of. Stop

this madness, and you won't have to find out._

Trent shook his head, his face contorted in anger. "Never," he said. "I'll never leave you alone until I get my flash drive back."

Whatever it was started typing again. Its final words were, _Then I'll see you soon._ Then, the laptop slammed shut, and two blood-red, malice-filled, eyes appeared for a split second, burning themselves into Trent's vision. The pressure on his chest was relieved, and the door slammed shut.

The presence was gone. Trent sat up in his chair, gasping. He didn't sleep that night.

* * *

><p>So, there are only three chapters left! What will happen next?

We'll find out on Sunday! In the meantime, let me know what you think so far?

25. Chapter Twenty-Four: Homecoming

So, as promised, here's chapter Twenty-Four! I hope you guys like it!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.

* * *

><p>Chapter Twenty-Four:

Homecoming

Norbury, New Hampshire

At ten o'clock the next day, they were all ready to go.

On their way, they found some cars and hotwired them. Three in total. Matt, Shade, Samantha, Alena, and Jeremy were in one car, Ben, Trent, Lucas, Anthony, and Alex in a second, and Joey, Brian, Kody, Andrew and Jean in a third.

After a few minutes of driving, they finally came to the Lyndrich border. Before crossing, they stopped so that they could figure out some sort of a plan.

"I say we split up," said Kody. Everyone looked at him like he was insane, and he quickly explained itself. "No, I mean, in groups. We can cover more ground in a shorter time."

"I don't like it," said Alex

"We do have evidence that suggests the Beast might only come out at night, though," said Jeremy.

"But even the group we sent during the day never returned," said

Alex. "How do you explain that?"

Jeremy shrugged. "They didn't get back in time."

"We could use those walkie-talkies that Jean brought," Matt suggested. Before they had left, Jean had filled a backpack with walkie-talkies, so that they could communicate if they got lost. "That way, if anything happens, everyone else can be warned."

"I actually think that might be the best idea," said Trent. "That might be the only way if we're going to do this by nightfall."

"What happens if we don't find him?" asked Ben.

"We'll come back tomorrow," Trent replied.

"Look, can we just decide on something?" Lucas complained, still leaning on a stick he had found. "I need to kick the Man in Black's ass."

"I think that's what we'll have to do," said Trent. "Anyone have any better ideas?"

Everyone wished they did, but they didn't. They spent a few more minutes revising their plan, and then Jean distributed walkie-talkies to all of them. Once they were all prepared, they set out.

They were split into five groups. First, Ben, Trent, Anthony and Lucas would cover Ben and Anthony's neighborhood. Then, the other two cars would continue. The second car would let Alex and Jeremy out to cover the road leading away from the fire station, which also happened to be the former neighborhood of Matt's friend Evan. Alex had heard rumors in Gunnerville that it was the only area of Lyndrich not under the Man in Black's control.

The second car would then proceed with Andrew, Jean and Kody to Andrew's neighborhood. The first car would stop at the beginning of Long Pond Rd to let off Joey, Brian, Samantha and Alena. They would go and scope out the area surrounding what used to be Sam's house. Finally, Matt and Shade would search Matt's neighborhood.

Once they were all done, they would meet at a location just outside the border before nightfall. If they found nothing, they would continue their work tomorrow.

They were all anxious, to say the least. There was absolutely no way of knowing what was out there. They could only hope that the rumors about the Beast only coming out at night were true.

But of all of them, nobody was as excited as Matt was. He almost didn't care about the danger. All he cared about was that finally, after all this time, he was going home.

When the first group reached Ben and Anthony's neighborhood, they decided to start at the very end, at Ben's house. They would work their way up from there.

"It's been a while," Ben commented. "I can't believe I'm actually coming back. I never thought I would."

"I thought I might come back someday," said Anthony. "I just wasn't sure when."

"Well while you girls are getting all emotional, I guess it's up to me and Trent to actually do something," said Lucas.

"Asswagon," said Ben.

They kept driving until they finally reached Ben's house. The door was still open, which was a good sign. A pang of grief shot through him, like someone had stabbed him in the heart, when he saw Katie's Mazda in his driveway.

Anthony saw it too, and realized what it was. "Is that Katie's?" he asked.

Ben nodded, his eyes watering. "Yeah," he said quietly.

"I'm sorry, man," he said. He already knew; Ben had told everybody who had asked. And everybody who knew him from Before had asked.

Ben blinked away the tears and shook away his grief. "Don't worry about it," he said. He walked forward, leading the way. "Let's make sure nobody's been in my house," he suggested.

They entered the house to find it exactly as it had been six months previous, except with a lot more dust. "Nice place you got here," said Lucas.

"Thanks," said Ben. "Okay, let's check this floor, and then we'll split up. Lucas, Trent, you take upstairs. Me and Anthony will check the basement."

The ground floor of his house was comprised of only a few rooms. They were quickly searched, and no zombies were found. "Alright, see you in a few minutes," said Trent.

Ben and Anthony opened the basement door and descended, keeping a lookout for zombies- or worse. The main room was empty, but that didn't mean anything. Carefully, they checked all of the closets and the storage room.

"Looks like the coast is clear," said Anthony. At that moment, they heard a gunshot from upstairs. The two of them looked at each other and then ran back up the stairs.

"What happened?" Ben asked.

"Found a zombie!" Trent replied.

"Fucker's dead now!" Lucas added.

Trent and Lucas finished clearing the upstairs, and then came down to meet with them. "All clear," said Trent.

"Alright," said Ben. "Let's go."

"Okay." Trent looked confused for a moment. "Wait a minute," he said. "You haven't been home for months, yet you're leaving so

quickly."

Ben shrugged. "It's a house. The world is full of them. Besides, who knows, maybe we'll be able to come back once this whole thing is over."

Meanwhile, Andrew, Kody and Jean were in Andrew's neighborhood. They had dropped off Alex and Jeremy right down the street from the unofficial town square. Then, they had backed up and taken the turn that led to Andrew's street.

Unlike Ben, Andrew lived near the beginning of the neighborhood. So, once they pulled in, they started from the front.

The first two houses were empty. Then, they were at Andrew's.

"I haven't been here in a while," Andrew commented. "Not since Carlton blocked us off."

The memories came back to him then, of Z-Day; of the vicious, terrifying struggle that they had been thrown into. They had fought tooth and nail to survive, and they had- but at a price. Whatever was left of their innocence had died that day.

"Come on," said Andrew. "Let's go in."

They went inside and searched the house, and then remained in there for longer than they did most other houses, and basked in their nostalgia, before finally moving on.

Around the same time, Matt and Shade were driving through Matt's neighborhood. Bitter nostalgia was passing through him, as he remembered all of the good times that he had had here. A tear fell down his cheek as he remembered all of the faces of the people who had lived in these streets. People he would never see again.

Shade noticed his distress, and crooned softly, eyes gleaming with concern. _"What's wrong?"_ they seemed to ask.

Matt sniffed, and blinked back the tears. "Nothing," he said. "I'm just getting nostalgic, that's all."

They finally reached Matt's house. For seven months, he had been dreaming of this moment, and now it was finally here. It came with a barrage of emotions. Excitement, happiness, regret, grief, nostalgia- you name it. But that was all overpowered by a sense of fulfillment.

He was home.

"Welcome home, Shade," he said. He slung his arm over the dragon's shoulders in a half hug. "Welcome home."

His house was large, with three stories (excluding the basement), and painted a yellowish color. Next to it was a pool, which was still covered in a green tarp. Matt shuddered inwardly as he imagined how filthy the water would be now.

Not much worse than the condition of the lawn, he thought. And that was true; the grass had grown out of control. It was longer than he

had ever seen it; and it was strewn with weeds.

But he didn't care. Home was still home, no matter what shape it was in.

As if to commemorate his triumph, the air suddenly became dotted with white spots. Matt smiled as he realized it was snowing.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go inside."

He let them both out and walked up the sidewalk to the front door. When he tried to open it, it was unlocked. "That's strange," he said. "We locked it when we left."

He suddenly became a lot more alert. "Keep your eyes open," he said to Shade. "Someone might be here." He slowly stepped inside the house, and looked around. Nothing. "Can you smell anything?"

Shade lifted his nose into the air and gave a few sniffs. There was nothing. A smell of human- and something else- was here, but it was stale, and so faint that he couldn't make it out much.

He shook his head. _"We're alone," _he said wordlessly.

"Okay," said Matt. "Still, let's not let our guard down too much."

Shade squeezed his way through the door, and Matt closed it behind them. "Well, this is home," he said. He glanced at the dragon standing in his hallway. For the umpteenth time, the sheer insanity of his situation hit him. "This is nuts," he said.

Shade cocked his head and gave him a questioning look.

"Everything," Matt replied. "Here, come see my room."

They walked up the stairs- very slowly, as Shade had a hard time fitting into the stairwell- and a wave of nostalgia hit him once again. When they reached the top, he made a U-turn around the railing to the left and walked down the hallway to his room. It was the last door on the right, before the hallway turned and led to a flight of stairs that led into the attic.

His bedroom door was closed. Carefully, he eased it open, and took a peek inside. There was nothing there.

In both senses of the word.

Bewildered, Matt swung the door open and waited for the realization to sink in. When it did, all he could muster was, "â€|Damn."

Almost everything in his room was gone.

Everything but the furniture, small things that didn't matter, and his posters. His books, movies, CDs; all were gone.

He was a little disappointed. The things that were missing weren't really that important, but he had been looking forward to seeing them again.

"And just think," he said to Shade. "I was this close to showing you How to Train Your Dragon. You would have gotten a kick out of that."

The second thing that he noticed was the tank that housed his turtle. Or, rather, the lack thereof. "What the hell?" he said. "I had a tank with a turtle- or, well, dead turtle, probably- right on that dresser!" he said, pointing to the dresser in the corner of the room, next to the bed. "This is weird," he thought aloud.

He turned to the desk, on the other side of the room, and saw Shade's gaze shifting between him and a piece of paper lying on the desk. Next to it were his spare glasses. "Yes!" he cheered. "Finally! I can see again!" Matt walked over to them and picked them up, putting them on. "Whoa," he said. "It feels weird with these on again after so long.

He then looked at the piece of paper. It was a note.

Matt, it read. If, somehow, you are still alive, and manage to find your way back here, you can pick up your stuff at my house. I came home after Z-Day, because I had nowhere else to go. While I was fleeing Vermont, I couldn't take a lot of my stuff with me, so I thought your How to Train Your Dragon and Pokémon merchandise would liven up my house a little bit. I might've gotten carried away, but rest assured, everything's safe. From, Sam. P.S. I buried your turtle. He smelled worse than the zombies. He's out back, if you can find him. Also, I think your cats and your dog got out. I couldn't find them anywhere.

Matt grinned slightly. "Sam, you bastard," he muttered. Then, a wave of emotions hit him. Speedy, his turtle, was dead. He had been expecting that, but it still hurt a little bit.

Being here, home for the first time since Z-Day, brought back memories; many good ones and many bad ones. For the first time since he had left Colorado, the grief threatened to overpower him. His family was dead, they were all dead. And he had watched them.

The emotional barrier he, like Shade, had built up over the past months was overflowing. Memories came pouring back, memories of the good times he had had with them. And then, their deaths. Even the memory he had tried to completely erase came back. The man who had died in Denver, all because of him.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed. His hands began to tremble, and a tear fell from his eye. "I'm sorry."

Shade walked over to him and crooned softly, and Matt reached over and wrapped his arm around his neck. They sat like that for a while, as Matt cried his grief and guilt out.

When they were done, they left the bedroom to search the rest of the house. Matt also took the time to give Shade a "tour" of sorts. Then, they left, to search the rest of the neighborhood.

Later on that day, about an hour before they were supposed to meet outside the town border, Alex and Jeremy were walking down Gerry Drive. The newfallen snow had begun to create a blanket over the earth. Normally, it wouldn't have taken long for them to get this

far, but they had to search every house on the way there.

They had chosen this part of town because from the information Carlton's men had gathered, the group of survivors that lived under the Man in Black's protection lived around here. They had no idea who they were, or how many; only that they were probably here.

"We should start heading back soon," said Jeremy. "We don't want them to leave us behind."

"That'd be the worst possible thing to happen," said Alex. "Honestly, I'm surprised nothing's happened yet. Maybe the Man in Black isn't home."

"They said his lab- which he apparently had- was destroyed," said Jeremy. "Where else would he go?"

Alex shrugged. "How the hell should I know?" They came across another house, and Jeremy pointed to it. "Let's try that," he said.

They walked up the driveway and to the front door. First, Jeremy knocked on it. "Hello?" he called. He was greeted with silence.

They looked at each other and shrugged. Jeremy tried the doorknob to find that it was unlocked. "I'm pretty sure that answers that question," said Jeremy. He was right; who in their right mind would leave the door unlocked?

"Let's see if there's anything of value in there," said Alex. For they had found some useful things in previous houses; food, batteries, ammo, flashlights, etc.

They entered the house, making sure to keep watch for zombies. They walked down the front hallway and into the kitchen. Alex immediately started looking through all the drawers and cupboards, while Jeremy checked the pantry.

"Nothing in here," he said. It was all food, and all expired. Anything that wasn't food was completely useless.

"Same here," said Alex. "Maybe there's something in the other rooms."

They opened a door that led away from the kitchen and proceeded through it, only to find themselves in a bathroom. Inside the bathroom was another cupboard with a mirror on the front. Jeremy opened it, and found several different types of pills and medications.

"Sweet," said Alex. "We could use some of these."

They began loading their pockets with bottles of medicine, when they heard a noise from the kitchen. It sounded like a groan.

They froze in place, staring at the door. "Shit," Alex whispered. Slowly, not daring to make any noise, they raised their guns and started walking back into the kitchen.

There were three of them. Their grotesque smell was already filling the kitchen, and their dead, cold eyes surveyed the room. Then, they

spotted the two live humans, and began shambling towards them.

They pulled out their knives, and stepped forward. Alex took the first one; he stabbed it right in the eye. The blade cut through the soft flesh and pierced the brain, killing it instantly. Jeremy took the next one. He stabbed it square in the forehead. Then, he turned to the third and did the same.

When they were all down, he paused to clean the blood off of his blade. "Let's get out of here, before more show up," said Alex. They walked into the hallway, but immediately ducked back into the kitchen when they saw what was coming.

Alex thought he had closed the door behind them. But he had accidentally left it open a crack. And now, they were paying the price for it. A fairly large group of zombies were now making their slow way towards them.

"Back door," Alex whispered.

"No shit," Jeremy replied.

They ran through the kitchen to another door, which led into another hallway. At the end of the hallway was the back door. Jeremy ran forward, opened it, and sprinted outside. He immediately wished he hadn't.

He now knew where the zombies had come from. They had been in the backyard the whole time, and the noise from the two of them knocking had attracted them.

"Gun time," said Alex.

"Yep," Jeremy agreed. They drew their automatics and unloaded. Bullets and blood filled the air, as zombies fell.

Eventually, they came to the end of their clips. While they had killed most of the zombies, a few remained. Jeremy was reaching for another clip, when one of them crept up next to him and grabbed his shoulder.

"Shit!" he yelled, dropping the gun and trying to push the zombie off. But all he managed to do was lose his balance and fall, bringing the zombie with him. The monster went for his throat, opening its mouth to expose its rotted teeth. Jeremy punched it, and reached for the gun that he had dropped.

Meanwhile, Alex was fumbling with his ammo clip. When he finally had it loaded, he aimed and fired. But his shot went astray. A zombie- the first from the group walking through the house- had grabbed onto him from behind, made him lose his shot, and was now attempting to get a mouthful of his flesh.

Taken by surprise, he stumbled forward, and slipped. As he crashed to the ground, the zombie came perilously close to biting him, but at the last second he lashed out at it.

"Fuck this shit!" he yelled. "I didn't sign up for this!"

"I didn't sign up for anything!" Jeremy yelled. His words came in

gasps, as he fought the zombie for his life. "All I wantedâ€¦ Was to go homeâ€¦ and play my PS3. But noooâ€¦ There had to be a FUCKING APOCALYPSE!"

The other zombies were getting close. It was only a matter of time before they would reach them, and then they would be finished. Jeremy began to brace himself for the end.

But the end didn't come. Instead, a fountain of red splattered onto the grass next to him, and a zombie fell with a gaping hole in its head. More of them fell, and gunshots echoed, until only the ones on top of them were left.

Still wrestling with the zombie, he craned his head to see who the shooters were. But before he could get a good look, a pair of hands shoved the zombie away from his body, and then brought the butt of a gun into its skull. The skull gave in with a sickening, watery crunch, and the zombie's head collapsed into itself.

A pair of hands offered themselves to him, and he grabbed them. As he hoisted himself up, he turned to look at their saviors as he brushed the snow off of his clothes.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" one of them, who was helping Alex up, asked. He was of average height, with short, dark brown hair, and carrying an AK-47. He was wearing a brown sweatshirt and black athletic pants. Jeremy immediately recognized him as an old friend of theirs, Nick.

"Nick?" he asked in shock.

Nick froze. "Holy shit," he said. "Jeremy? Alex? You guys are alive?"

"Jeremy?" the other person, a tall boy of about their age with short black hair and a freckly face wearing a black sweatshirt and blue jeans, asked. "Alex?"

"Yeah!" Alex exclaimed. "Holy shitâ€¦ I can't believe we ran into _more_ people!"

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"We're with a whole group of people right now!" said Jeremy. "A bunch of our friends from Before! We're all across Lyndrich right now!"

Nick's face turned grave. "What the fuck were you doing here?" he asked.

"Wellâ€¦ We were looking for you," said Alex.

"Were you looking for us?" asked the black-haired boy. "Or were _we_ looking for _you_?"

Jeremy stared at him. "What the fuck are you talking about, Evan?"

"Don't worry about him," said Nick. "He hasn't really been the same since Z-Day, if you know what I mean. You should be more worried

about your friends right now. What the hell were you doing in Lyndrich? Do you have any idea who lives in the rest of the town?"

"Yeah, we know him. We're all here looking for him," said Alex.

Nick's eyes widened. "Jesus Christ," he said. "You're even crazier than Evan!"

"Hey!" Evan exclaimed. "That's not cool! I'm the crazy one!"

"Why the hell would you do that?" asked Nick.

"We've had trouble with him in the past, and he stole something from us. We're here to take it back," said Alex.

Nick shook his head. "No, no no. This isn't just some guy you can go to war with and win. You're going to lose. And unless you get your friends out of town right now, you're all going to die!"

"Relax," said Jeremy. "We've been walking alone all day and nothing's happened to us."

"Have you ever stopped to think that maybe that's because he doesn't want anything to happen yet?"

Jeremy and Alex were speechless for a moment. They hadn't really thought of whether or not they were in control here. But now that they didâ€|

Their train of thought was cut off as a voice appeared on their walkies. Jeremy grabbed it out of his pocket and held it up to his ear, listening.

It was Samantha.

"Guysâ€| Joey and Brian. They've disappeared!""

Alex and Jeremy looked at each other in shock. "Oh shit," said Alex.

****Earlier that dayâ€|****

After Matt had dropped them off at the intersection of Long Pond Road, Joey, Brian, Alena and Samantha had started walking. Several minutes later; they reached their destination; Sam's house.

They stood outside for a moment, admiring the small, yellow house with the nearly nonexistent front yard. "Here it is," said Joey. "I haven't been here in years. Since he moved to Vermont, actually."

"Let's go in," said Samantha. "I highly doubt he's here anymore, but maybe there's a clue somewhere."

The door was unlocked, and they let themselves in. "Well," said Brian. "At least we know he was here."

They were in his living room. There was a large couch in the middle,

with a flat screen TV in a corner. Attached to it was the kitchen. Two doors led off to another, smaller living room and the bedrooms, while the other led to a bathroom. A hallway to their right led to a flight of stairs. Scattered all throughout the room were various things that related to Sam's interests; Pok  mon, dragons, Portal, etc.

"Oh yeah," said Joey. "But not anymore. The door would've been locked."

"He left in a hurry, then," said Alena. "Three guesses as to why."

"Oh, don't tell me," said Brian. He pretended to think hard, then said, "The Man in Black. Or Carlton. Either one."

"Come on," said Samantha. "Let's look around."

"Right," said Joey. "You two take that half of the house," he pointed to the left, to where the bedrooms were. "And me and Brian will take this half."

Samantha and Alena proceeded through the kitchen and into the other living room, keeping watch for zombies or anything- or anyone- else that might be waiting for them. They checked the surrounding rooms, and then found the staircase.

"What the hell?" Samantha asked. "I thought the stairs were back there."

Alena shrugged. "Some houses are built weirdly. Come on, let's go."

They ascended the stairs and arrived in a bedroom. A wall jutted out, cutting the room in two halves, connected by a doorway.

"I'm guessing this used to be two bedrooms," said Alena. "But only one person lived here recently."

"That would make sense," said Samantha. "Especially because there's a bed _right there_."

Alena glanced over to the window, and saw a bed right underneath it. "Oh," she said. "Right."

They walked through the doorway and emerged into another bedroom. Only this one was much more cluttered.

"Something tells me this was his," said Samantha.

"What makes you say that?" Alena asked sarcastically. "Was it the dragons everywhere or the Pok  mon?"

She was right. The whole room was decorated as such.

They looked through the room, trying to find a clue as to where he had gone, but nothing was to be found. "Nothing's here," said Alena. "Let's get moving."

Samantha hesitated, then nodded. "Okay," she said.

On their way out, however, the light from the window glinted off of something on the floor. Alena stopped and bent down to examine the object. It was about the size of her palm, and it was flat, smooth, and black, and the edges were sharp. It was in the shape of an imperfect circle. It almost seemed polished, for the sun shone off of it like it would a jewel. But there was a natural quality to it that she couldn't quite put her finger on.

"Are you coming, Alena?" asked Samantha.

"Yeah," she said. She stood up, put the object in her pocket, and followed her friend.

A while later, about an hour and a half before they were supposed to meet up with Matt and Shade, they decided to start heading back. They had searched many houses after Sam's, and all they had found was a few zombies.

Alena felt weird. Something about the day hadn't added up, but she couldn't put her finger on what. It gave her the creeps, and she just wanted to leave before anything happened.

Joey, meanwhile, had to use the bathroom. Seeing as there was no bathroom, he decided that the woods would be a fair alternative.

"Guys, I gotta take a piss," he said. "Keep walking. I'll catch up to you in a minute."

"I'll wait here for you," said Brian.

"Thanks," said Joey. He slung his gun over his shoulder and walked off into the woods. Samantha and Alena kept walking.

Joey kept going further into the woods, until Brian was out of sight, and then choose a tree. About a minute later, he emerged from the forest to find Brian missing.

His heart gave a nervous flutter. "Brian?" he called. He was met with silence. "Come on man, this isn't funny."

He heard a branch crack in the woods behind him, and immediately whirled around, aiming his weapon at the trees. "Brian, stop. Please," he said.

A branch cracked again. Something was definitely in there. Keeping his weapon drawn, he slowly made his way back to the tree line.

When he was about a foot away, a gloved fist in a yellow sleeve appeared from a bush and punched him in the stomach.

Joey doubled over in pain, dropping his gun in the process. His attacker emerged fully from the bush, and grabbed his shirt, lifting him up over their head. "No," he said. "Please!"

There was no negotiating with this person, whoever it was. They turned around to face the woods and threw him forward. His body crashed into a tree, knocking the wind out of him, and he slumped to the ground. The snow began to melt into his shirt, soaking it. He

tried to yell, but all that would come out was a barely audible, high-pitched whine.

His attacker ran forward, grabbed his shirt again, lifted him up and held him against the tree. Looking into their eyes, Joey saw that their entire body- with the exception of their eyes- was encased in a baggy yellow jacket and pants. He couldn't even tell what the sex of the person was.

"Whoâ€¦ are you?" he asked weakly.

The person ignored him, reached into their pocket, and produced a syringe. "What's that?" he asked in terror. "Please get that away from me!"

Once again, his attacker ignored him. They found a vein in his neck, and stuck the needle into it. Joey yelled in pain, but it only lasted a few seconds. Then, he began to feel exhausted. His eyes wouldn't stay open.

No, he thought. _I have to stay awake. I haveâ€¦ to stayâ€¦ awakeâ€¦!_

And then the darkness overtook him.

* * *

><p>So, we're just about ready for the Part One finale. Which, by the way, is comprised of both of the last two chapters! As a result, I will be uploading not one of them but BOTH of them on Wednesday. That's right, it's a double chapter!

So you'll get to see how this all plays out in just three days.

Until then, have fun and be safe!

26. Chapter Twenty-Five: Solstice

Ugh I'm soooooorrrrrrryyyy

I was kinda busy on Wednesday and didn't get a chance to get this up, so I had to do most of it today and ugh I'm really sorry I left you guys hanging.

Anyway, this is it! The finale to Part One! I did kind of exaggerate a little bit last chapter, I realize; this isn't really a two-part finale as much as a finale and then an epilogue leading into the next part. But anyway, enough talk, you guys want the chapter. And here it is!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.

* * *

><p>Chapter Twenty-Five:

Solstice

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

It was nightfall in Lyndrich. And the woman in yellow was walking through a trail in the woods. A trail that led to Rockrimmon Hill.

She emerged from the trail into the clearing at the summit, and spotted them. They were at the very edge of the hill, looking out over the town (not Lyndrich, but a town adjacent to it), below. These were the ones in charge.

Neither one of them were the one people called "The Man in Black." These were the ones behind the scenes. The ones that helped to make it all happen. The Man in Black's co-leader and their second-in-command. Together, the three of them formed a triangle of leadership.

"Hey," she said to them. "I've done my job."

The two of them turned around. "Hey," the one to the left greeted. "Good. I'm glad to hear it."

"What next?" she asked.

"We were just about to discuss that with the others," said the one to the right. "You have great trenting."

"We're putting the rest of the plan into effect," the first one said. "The enemies in the Highlands have been taken care of. The rest were given their chance to leave, and they failed to take it."

"The others will set their traps," the second one continued. "And we will begin the attacks."

"What should I do?" the woman asked.

"You've done enough," said the first. "If you want, you can go around and help where needed."

The woman nodded. "Thanks," she said. She was about to turn to leave, when another question popped into her head.

"What about the Night Fury?" she asked.

The first grimaced. "Leave him to me."

****One hour earlierâ€|****

_"__Guysâ€| Joey and Brian. They've disappeared!"_

Immediately, Trent, Ben, Lucas and Anthony looked at their walkies in shock. Trent picked up his walkie to say something, but Matt beat him to it.

_"__I'm coming to get you right now. Where are you?"_

_"__Up the street from Sam's house," _Alena replied.

_"__Okay, I'll be right there."_

Trent chose his moment to speak. "Everybody, get back to the meeting place. Now."

_"Whoa, whoa, wait a minute," _said Kody. _"How do we know they didn't just get lost or something?"_

_"Because this is how it always starts," _said Alex.

There was silence for a moment. "What are you talking about?" asked Ben, who had pulled out his walkie as well.

_"The Gunnerville expeditions," _said Alex. _"The one person who came back explained how it started, and this was it."_

_"So we're just going to leave them there?" _asked Kody.

"No," said Trent. "Not yet. We're just going to regroup. We'll decide what to do then."

There was silence. Then, _"Fine."_

Trent put his walkie away, and then looked to the others. "Come on," he said. "Hurry!"

They got into the car, a black Toyota, with Ben at the wheel, Anthony in the front seat, and Trent and Lucas in the back. They immediately pulled out of Tartan Court, where they had just been checking the last house, and made their way to the Hampstead border. They were constantly looking for signs of danger.

"Come on," Ben muttered to the car. "The border's right here. We just have to-"

Suddenly, there was a rustling in the woods ahead of them as the Man in Black stepped out into their path.

"I'm gonna ram him!" Ben exclaimed. "I'm sick of this shit!"

He accelerated the car, but the Man in Black didn't move. Instead, he merely stuck out his hand.

The car stopped immediately. "What the dick?" Anthony yelled. Ben revved the engine, but the car wouldn't budge.

In one swift motion, the Man in Black shoved his hand back, and the car was airborne. "Holy Jesus Christ on a sandwich!" Lucas screamed. It made one nearly complete flip through the air before landing on its nose. The front of the car was completely totaled, and the four passengers lurched forward. Trent hit his head on the seat in front of him, and while it was padded, it still hurt. A lot.

Momentum carried the car backwards, and it came to a crashing halt on its wheels. Trent's head nearly hit the ceiling.

Pain flared in his leg. When he regained his bearings, he looked around the car. Everyone was unconscious but him. Ben was hunched over the steering wheel, blood dripping from his mouth. Anthony was hanging limply out of the now-broken window. Lucas had collapsed onto Trent's lap, and was bleeding from a gash in his forehead.

Trent moved Lucas's head off of his lap and opened the door. When he stood up, the pain in his leg intensified and it almost gave out. _I must've sprained it, _he thought.

He looked up the street, to where the Man in Black was still watching him. Immediately, he took out his gun and started limping towards him. He fired a whole clip of ammo at him, only to see them stop in midair and scatter.

"What the fuck is this?" he asked.

The Man in Black only laughed. "This," he said. "Is what you've been messing with."

White hot fury erupted in Trent's chest, and he charged towards him. With a roar of anger, he lifted his fist to strike the Man in Black in the face.

His fist froze mid punch, and his whole body was immobilized. With a slow, deliberate movement, the Man in Black moved his hand so that it was pointing to a tree. Trent's body was lifted into the air and thrown to the tree, crashing into it head on and knocking the wind out of him.

Slowly, he was turned to face the Man in Black. "I warned you," the Man in Black said. "I gave you more than enough chances. But you _never listen_."

"Don'tâ€¦ hurt them," Trent wheezed. "Please."

"Your friends here? I'm taking them," the Man in Black said. "But I'll tell you what. I'll give the others on more chance, because they're only here because of you."

"Bastard," he said. "Why don't youâ€¦ fight like a man?"

The Man in Black chuckled. "I think we both know how that would end," he said. He yanked his hand back, and then pushed forward again. Trent's head surged forward with it, and then crashed back into the tree. His vision went black.

Matt was driving down Main Street in his neighbor's pickup truck when it happened.

His walkie started making noise, and he pulled it out to listen to it. When he heard the voice on the other end, he immediately braked.

It was the Man in Black.

_"__I hate to say I told you so, butâ€¦ I did," _he said. _"Your friends that were exploring the Highlands are now mine. They're gone. But you might still have a chance to live."_

Again, Matt was struck with a feeling of recognition. He knew the voice, but the sound quality of the walkie was too poor to make out who it was.

_"__Do you know what tonight is?" _the voice asked. _"December 21__st___. The Winter Solstice. That means that it'll be night only an

hour from now. You have until then to leave Lyndrich. If you don't, then you have a long night ahead of you. Good luck."_

The walkie went silent. _"Who the fuck are you?" _screamed Kody, his voice dripping with fury.

"That," said Matt. "Was him. The Man in Black."

After he picked up Samantha and Alena, he headed right for their meeting place on the border. Upon his arrival, he saw that they were the last people to get there.

They all got out of the truck and greeted the others. After having to answer a few question about where he got a pair of glasses, they began to discuss their missing friends. "We have to go back there," said Kody. "We can't just leave them behind."

"You heard him!" Andrew protested. "They're dead!"

"We don't know that yet," said Kody. "The Man in Black might want to question him first. He might be holding them somewhere."

"That's a possibility," Jeremy agreed.

"We have a half hour," said Matt. "That should be enough time to get some idea of where they might be."

"We could get the other survivors to help," Alex suggested. "We met a couple of them."

After much debate, they finally agreed on that plan. A minute or two of further discussion later, they decided on an action plan. They got into three separate groups. Alex and Jeremy got into the truck, Kody, Jean, Andrew, Samantha and Alena got into a grey van they had found, and Matt and Shade flew.

Matt and Shade were to fly immediately to where Ben, Trent, Lucas and Anthony had gone missing to scout out the area. Alex and Jeremy would find the survivors, and then meet up with him. The others would go search Main Street, where Joey and Brian disappeared.

When they were ready to go, Matt hopped onto Shade's back and the two of them flew away. The others got into their cars and drove off.

When Alex and Jeremy arrived at the house they had met up with Evan and Nick at. They drove up and down the street, looking for _someone_, when they finally saw them.

Alex slowed to a stop right next to them, and rolled down the window. "Hey, guys! We need your help!"

"Does it have anything to do with that suicide mission you guys are on?" asked Nick. "Because if it is, I'm going to have to pass."

"The Man in Black got Ben, Joey and Brian!" said Jeremy. "We need to get them back! We need your help!"

Nick frowned. "Who's the Man in Black?"

"I am," said Evan.

"Who's the Man in Black?" Nick repeated.

"The guy who runs Lyndrich," Jeremy replied.

"Oh. Him," said Nick. "I'm sorry to say this, then, but they're probably dead."

"Maybe not," said Alex. "We're looking for them. Since you know this place better than we do, how about you come help us?"

"And why would we do that? Like I said before, he's probably dead, and it's a suicide mission."

"Because you'd get to see an old friend again, and help him live another day," Jeremy replied.

Nick appeared to consider, while Evan kept up the blank expression on his face. Finally, Nick said, "Fine. I'll help. But only for a little while. You're lucky you're getting my help at all."

"I'll go too," said Evan. "I'm bored."

Jeremy smiled. "Then hop on in," he said.

Matt and Shade had found the car Trent and the others had been in, and were searching the forest around it for clues. Right before Alex and Jeremy had arrived with Nick and Evan, they had found something.

One patch of undergrowth had been flattened, as if something large had been dragged through it. Like a body. Matt followed it, and saw that it continued into the forest.

He heard the sound of an approaching car, and looked back. It was Alex and Jeremy. The two of them started walking back through the woods.

The others got there first. The four of them were already out of the car by the time Matt arrived. He emerged from the woods before Shade did. "Did you find them?" he asked.

"Matt!" someone yelled.

"What- Holy shit!" he exclaimed when he realized who it was. "Evan! You're alive!"

"Hey, don't forget me!" said someone else. Matt looked towards the sound of the voice, and saw Nick.

"Oh my God!" he said. "This day just keeps getting weirder."

As if to prove his point, Shade stepped out of the woods.

"Holy fucking shit!" Nick shouted. "What is that?"

Evan, on the other hand, seemed lost for words. He just stared at Shade in a weird trance.

"Oh, him?" Jeremy asked. "That's a dragon." He said it as if it were a completely normal sight.

"Wh-what? A dragon? That'sâ€¦| that's impossible!"

"Not when you're me," said Evan.

Matt stared at him, and then looked at Nick. "Is he okay?" he asked.

"Not at all," Jeremy replied, as Nick was still left speechless by the sight of Shade. "Z-Day messed him up, from what I understand."

"I see," Matt replied. "I'm sorry about that."

Matt turned to Nick. "In response to you, yes, it is possible apparently. Shade, meet Nick and Evan. Nick and Evan, meet Shade."

Shade dipped his head in greeting.

"So, have you found anything?" asked Alex.

"Yeah," said Matt. We scouted out the area, and found a couple things. First, on the car." He led them over to the car and showed them the side. On it was carved a message:

_YOU WERE WARNED__._

"Yeah, by us," said Nick.

"I doubt that's what he means," said Jeremy. "Maybe he warned Trent?"

"But Trent never told us anythingâ€¦|" said Matt.

"Well yeah," Alex explained. "We'd have never agreed to come if he had."

"That clever bastard," said Matt.

"Anything else?" asked Jeremy.

"Yeah." He pointed to the trees where he and Shade had emerged. "Over there. We found a trail."

He showed them the trail that they had found. "Well, what are we waiting for?" asked Alex. "Let's go!"

"I don't like it," Matt explained. "It seems too obvious. It might be a trap."

"Well, we have a dragon. That should at least be able to offer us protection," said Nick.

Jeremy and Alex looked at each other and shrugged. "He lives here," said Alex. "I'll take his word."

They began following the trail into the woods. For what felt like an

hour, they walked, deeper and deeper. The snow kept falling, and by this point there was a thick blanket covering the ground, touching everything except the imprints made by their footsteps.

The sky was starting to darken. Without speaking, they all knew it was almost time to go back.

"We should really head back," said Jeremy. "It's getting late, and we _definitely _don't want to be here at dark."

"No, really?" asked Alex sarcastically.

Matt was about to agree. He opened his mouth, but then saw something that made him stop.

"What's that over there?" he asked. Pointing forward, he squinted to see.

"It looks like another message," said Nick.

The six of them ran over to a tree and saw a series of symbols carved into it:

ãfžãffãf-

"What does it mean?" asked Alex.

"It looks likeâ€| Japanese, or something," said Matt. "I don't know."

"So what does it say?" Jeremy asked. "Does anybody here read Japanese?"

"Your mom," Evan replied.

"Evan," said Nick. "Shut up."

"Well, maybe there's something hidden around here," said Alex. "Try digging into that snowbank." He pointed to a snowbank at the base of the tree.

Matt began digging through the snow drift, until his hand came into contact with something hard. He got a grip on it, and pulled.

His hand came free of the snow, bringing with it a large thermos. "The fuck?" asked Nick.

Matt shrugged, and opened it. Inside was a roll of paper. "What is that?" asked Alex.

"A picture of your mom," Evan replied.

"Evan," said Nick. "Shut. Up."

Matt removed the paper from the bottle and unrolled it, revealing a map of Lyndrich. On it were marked all of the main landmarks, and several other places.

"Holy shit," he said. "It's his entire operation."

All over the place, different locations were circled and written over, describing different places of importance. Matt didn't even know what half of them were. Only two really stuck out to him.

The first was Rockrimmon Hill, a hill in the woods accessible by the trail at the end of his street. The map marked it as Headquarters.

"Son of a bitch," he said. "I was right there." The entrance to the trail that led to Rockrimmon Hill was on his street. "I was so close."

"What?" asked Jeremy.

"Their baseâ€¦ it's on Rockrimmon Hill."

"Is that where your friends are?" asked Nick.

"I don't knowâ€¦" Matt examined the rest of the map, and that was when the second location caught his eye. The Police Station.

On it was written, "Prison."

"No," he said. "They're in the police station!"

He folded up the map and put it in his pocket. "Someone get the others on the walkie. Tell them to meet us there."

"Whoa, whoa whoa," said Alex. "First of all, you're not the boss here. Second, don't you think this is a little convenient?"

Matt frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, we just followed a painfully obvious trail through the woods and found a map of their entire operation. Either this is a trap, or this guy's an idiot- and we both know that he isn't."

"Still. If we all work together, we can fight them, I know it."

"He has a beast on his side!"

"And we have Shade!"

"Guys!" Evan's voice cut through their argument. He seemed dazed. "It's really quiet," he said, matter-of-factly.

It was then that they realized it was almost completely dark.

"We need to get back," said Nick. "Right now."

But it was too late.

A voice spoke over the walkie again. The Man in Black.

"I hate to crash your party," he said. _"But your time has run out."_

Instantly, all six of them looked into each other's eyes. Dread passed through them like a wave.

"I knew we shouldn't have come here," said Alex. "This was a bad idea from the start!"

_"__Run. Just try. Maybe you can make it out alive. I highly doubt it, though. Good luck!"_

He offered no further explanation as to what was to happen to them.

"We need to go, now!" yelled Matt.

Suddenly, a scent reached Shade's nose. He sniffed a few times, trying to determine its source. He couldn't. It was unlike anything he'd ever smelled before.

Whatever it was, it was getting closer. He could hear it moving through the trees, just barely making noise. With one look at them, he could tell the humans couldn't hear it. But he could.

He turned towards the sound of the noise, and growled. Taking a few steps forward, he put himself between it and the humans, spreading his wings as to protect them. He tried to make himself look as intimidating as possible.

"What's going on?" asked Nick. The fear in his voice was obvious.

"Shh!" Matt whispered. "Something's out there."

Shade still couldn't see what it was. But he knew it could see him. He could sense it. He knew it was trying to decide whether to attack or not. This went on for a matter of seconds, but it felt like whole minutes.

Eventually, it decided against it. The sounds came again, this time growing fainter, along with the smell.

He folded his wings and relaxed his muscles, signaling that the coast was clear for the time being.

"Please, can we just leave?" asked Nick.

"Yes," said Evan. "We're leaving, now."

"We're coming with you," said Alex. "We're getting the hell out of here."

They started walking. It wasn't even a minute before Matt suddenly said, "The others! What about the others?"

He pulled out his walkie and pressed the button. "Kody? Jean? Andrew? Alena? Samantha? Are any of you there?"

The others focused most of their attention on the walkie, waiting for the reply. But they never heard it.

At that moment, the scent returned. And the noise as well. It was getting much stronger much faster this time. Shade turned to it and saw that Jeremy was the closest to it.

"Get back!" he growled.

Jeremy turned to look at him. It took a moment, but he understood.

"What are you doing? Get back!"

Jeremy lifted his leg to take a step forward, but before he could, he froze. He was completely immobilized.

Shade sensed an electrical current in the air around him. _What is this? _He thought.

Suddenly, a rope-like substance burst out of the woods and wrapped around Jeremy. It pulled him off of his feet and into the woods.

"Run!" someone yelled. There was no hesitation.

On the other side of town, Andrew, Kody, Jean, Alena and Samantha were in their car, making their way back to the town border. They had been searching the whole time, and had found nothing. They had just gotten into their car to meet the others when the message came.

_ "___I hate to crash your party, but your time's run out."_

Immediately, Jean, who was driving, looked to the two boys next to him in dread.

_ "___Run. Just try. Maybe you can make it out alive. I highly doubt it though. Good luck!"_

"Floor it," said Kody. "Now!"

Jean didn't ask questions. He slammed his foot down, and the car shot forward like a bullet.

It was almost completely dark. Dark enough so that he could only see clearly what was illuminated by his headlights. Dark enough so that he couldn't see the shadow emerging from the trees in front of them until it was too late.

His headlights briefly caught something. Jean wasn't able to see it clearly, but he knew that it was something big.

"What the fuck was that?" asked Andrew, nervous. He had seen it too.

Suddenly, from behind them, a ferocious roar echoed down the street.

"Holy fucking shit!" Kody nearly screamed. "Drive faster!"

Jean sped forward, as small rumblings began vibrating through the ground. "Fuck this shit!" he yelled.

The rumbles came closer, and another roar came from right behind them. The car was filled with panicked screams. Jean looked in his rearview mirror, but all he could see was an enormous shadow.

"What _is _that?" asked Jean.

"I don't fucking know, and I don't fucking care!" Kody yelled. "Just get us the fuck out of here!"

Jean drove even faster.

They finally seemed to be outrunning the beast. The rumblings were getting increasingly fainter. Suddenly, however, the headlights illuminated a large log in the road ahead.

Jean slammed on the brakes and swerved to the side. His passengers screamed as the car began to tilt on its side, threatening to spill over. Finally, the tires collided with the log, and the car fell to the side.

They were jolted around as the car rolled, clinging desperately to whatever they could reach. They grabbed these handholds helplessly as the rest of their bodies were whipped around in place as the metal deathtrap rolled. Finally, it came to a rest on its wheels.

There was a triumphant roar down the road, and the rumbles came closer again. This time, they couldn't outrun it. They had to hide.

"Everyone, out of the car!" Jean ordered.

Looking around, he saw that Andrew, Alena and Samantha were all right, despite a few cuts and bruises. Kody, however, was unconscious in the middle.

"Andrew!" he yelled, grabbing his legs. "Help me carry him!"

The rumblings were getting stonger. Jean looked towards them, and saw the shadow of the monster getting closer.

"Fuck!" Alena yelled. "My door's stuck!"

Samantha scooted over and tried to help her force the door open, while Andrew and Jean picked up Kody. The rumblings were getting closer, until finallyâ€|

They stopped.

It was only a brief second. Jean and Andrew made eye contact, passing confused and worried glances. Then it hit the car.

The monster landed on the roof, creating a huge indent. Any windows that were still intact after the crash were blown outward, and they were pressed against the sides.

"Holy shit!" Andrew yelled. The girls in the back screamed. That was when a large, hand-like appendage shoved its way through the front window and grabbed his shirt. Almost immediately, it pulled back out, taking Andrew with it.

"No!" he screamed. "Help me!"

"Andrew!" yelled Jean. His friend disappeared, and there was another

scream, followed by a loud _thump._ Then, Andrew's body fell from the roof, landing on the ground next to them.

"Oh, hell no," Jean said. He reached beside him and grabbed his pistol, aiming it at the ceiling. "Eat lead, motherfucker!" he yelled, and unloaded.

There was only one shot in the barrel, but it hit home. The monster let out an agonized roar, and a few drops of blood landed on the jagged remains of the windshield.

"That's right! Fuck you!" He reached into his pocket to take out another clip of ammo, when the hand came back.

This time, it grabbed his shirt. "Oh fuck," he said, before it dragged him back out.

The girls behind him screamed, but it didn't register in his mind. All he was aware of was the hand dragging his body out of the car and holding him into the air. The hand turned him around until he was facing the monster eye to eye.

He gasped, and his eye widened in shock. "What the fuck?" he asked.

The monster snarled at him. The last thing he remembered was his head being smashed against the roof of the car.

Back in the forest, the others were running as fast as they could through the trees, and stumbling through the snow drifts. Behind them, a large _something_ was crashing through the undergrowth, matching their speed.

"Motherfucking ass-licking cock-sucking bull-shitting motherfucking fuck! WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?!" Nick screamed.

After another minute or so, the thrashings in the undergrowth following them began to move steadily away. Another minute after that, it appeared to be gone completely.

As he noticed this, Matt stopped and stood still, hunched over, regaining his breath.

The others stopped as well. "What are you doing?!" Alex yelled.

"I needâ€¦ a restâ€¦" Matt gasped. "And besidesâ€¦ I think weâ€¦ lost it."

Shade sniffed the air, and then looked at him. _No, we didn't. We just bought more time._

"Never mind," said Matt. He stood back up, his breath less labored. "Let's keep going."

"Wait," said Nick. "Why don't we just shoot it?"

Matt looked at his gun in exasperation. "Iâ€¦ I don't know," he said.

"Why the hell didn't I think of that?" asked Alex. He holstered his

weapon. "Next time it shows itself, it's going down."

They didn't have long to wait. In no time, the beast in the trees was back, crashing through it. "Go!" Alex yelled.

They unloaded into the trees, spraying bullets everywhere. The trunks were torn up, and the snow was checkered with holes. By the time they were done, the crashing had stopped.

"Did we get it?" asked Nick.

"I don't know," said Matt.

They waited a few moments. Nothing happened.

"Yeah!" Alex yelled, raising his hands. "We did i-"

He fell silent, and stood completely still. "Alex?" Matt asked. "What are you doing?"

He began to fall forward. When he was halfway to the ground, another rope-like object whipped out of the trees and wrapped around him.

"Jesus Christ!" Matt yelled. "Alex! No!"

Before he could do anything, the rope dragged him into the undergrowth, and the beast began running towards them.

"Run!" Matt yelled.

They ran as fast as they could away from the monster. Nick ran straight for at least five minutes, not daring to so much as look back. The entire time, he muttered swear words under his breath.

Finally, he couldn't run any more. He stopped to a brisk walk, and began to catch his breath.

"I think we outran it," said Evan.

Nick exhaled in relief. "Good," he said. "Let's keep going." He stood up and looked around. "Where's Matt and Shade?"

"Uhâ€¦ I don't knowâ€¦" said Evan.

Nick stomped the ground in frustration. "God help them," he said. He holstered his weapon and continued through the forest. "Let's go," he said.

"Where?" asked Evan.

"To the police station. I need to shoot a bad guy more than anything right now, and I don't think we're getting out of here without taking them down first."

Alena screamed.

She screamed as she saw Jean's body drop in front of her door.

"We need to leave, right now!" yelled Samantha. She tried to open her door, but it was still jammed.

"Help me!" she yelled.

Alena moved to her, and together they rammed themselves against the door. Their combined weight was enough to unjam it, and they slipped out of the vehicle. Behind them, the monster's hand swiped past, barely missing them. They heard a roar of rage, and a tremor as it began following them.

"Into the woods!" Alena yelled. "We'll be able to out-maneuver it there!"

They ran into the forest on the side of the road, and continued running, not looking back. Behind them, the monster continued its chase, but it was too big to maneuver through the trees easily. They were outrunning it, and fast. Eventually, it gave up, and retreated.

When they heard the noise of the monster fading away, they looked at each other.

"Is it gone?" asked Samantha.

Alena nodded. "I think so. Let's keep running, though. See if we can find a place to hide until morning."

Samantha nodded in agreement. They slowed their pace to a walk, and continued their trek.

Minutes passed. Minutes turned into an hour. The sky was now completely black, and the woods had taken on a creepy atmosphere.

Alena desperately wanted to find somewhere to stay. The woods seemed to have taken on a life of its own. It felt like it was watching her, following her.

"You know what surprises me?" asked Samantha, breaking the silence.

"What?" Alena asked.

"I haven't seen a single zombie in these woods."

"With that thing running around? They're all dead."

They kept walking for a few more minutes, before they finally caught sight of a house.

"Thank God," said Samantha. They began running towards it, and arrived at a back door.

"Be careful," said Alena. "Someone might be here. Or something."

They slowly opened the door, and peered in. Alena reached into her pocket and took out a flashlight that she had brought with her, shining it into the room.

It was empty.

They opened the door fully, stepped inside, and closed it behind them. "Let's make sure we're alone," said Alena. "And then we can hide here."

Carefully, they searched the house, only to find it empty. They were safe.

They made camp in the basement, thinking that it would be the best place to hide. While Samantha was busy barricading the door, Alena pulled out her walkie and spoke into it.

"Hello?" she asked. "Hello?"

Silence.

"Is anyone still alive?"

At first, there was no response. Then, a voice came. _"I am," _the Man in Black said.

"You," she said. "You little fucker."

_"__Call me whatever name you want," _he said. _"It doesn't change the fact that you're done for."_

Alena laughed. "Do you even know where I am?" she asked.

For a moment, there was silence. Then, he said, _"Yes."_

At the top of the stairs, Samantha was hauling up wood to board the door. She had just place it on the top step, when the door swung itself shut.

She frowned, and tried to open it, but it was locked. "Alena," she said nervously. "I think someone's here."

_"__Or, rather, my friend does,"_ the Man in Black continued. _"Good luck with that. She's ruthless."_

Alena wanted to reply, but she couldn't. She was too terrified for words. Finally, she turned to Samantha. "We need to get out, she said. "Now."

"W-we can't," Samantha replied. "It's locked."

As soon as she said those words, the door burst into flame.

There it was. The Police Station.

Evan and Nick had been walking for a few hours before finally getting here. Neither of them spoke much, except for the occasional random outburst from Evan. They just wanted to be done with this.

"Okay," said Nick. "They'll never let us return to living under their protection. Not after this. So, we're going to hit them where it hurts, and then disappear forever. We'll stop by our house, grab a few things, and leave. Got it?"

"Sure," Evan replied.

"Hopefully we won't have to, though. Maybe we can end this here, and save the others. Okay, let's go." They walked across the street and up to the Police Station entrance.

Nick slowly eased the door open and poked his head inside. It was empty. He turned and motioned to Evan that the coast was clear, and they entered.

Before they had so much as taken five steps, the door swung closed behind them. "What the fuck?" asked Nick, his heart filling with dread. "What's going on?"

Evan tried to open the door, but couldn't. "Did you lock it?" he asked.

"No," Nick replied. "Why the hell would I lock it? _How _the hell would I lock it?"

A strange presence passed into the room. For Nick, it felt like he was being watched. But for Evan, it was different.

There was someone else in his mind.

He could feel the entity invading it, pressing his conscious down. He fought to drive it out, but it was strong. So strongâ€¦

He knelt down to the ground, clutching his head, groaning in the effort to fight off the hostile conscious. In the front of his vision, two evil, glowing red eyes began fading into view. The clearer they got, the more the entity inside him gained control.

"Evan?" Nick asked, the fear in his voice obvious. "Evan? What's wrong?"

He was losing the fight. The entity had control of over half of his mind now, and was gaining even more ground. He was rapidly losing strength, and he soon knew that it would take over.

He had to warn Nick. Whatever it was meant them harm, and Nick had to get away from him. He mustered all of his remaining strength to yell, "NICK! RUN!"

"What-"

The entity took over.

"What-"

Nick's question was cut off as Evan sprang up from the ground with a yell. He threw his gun at Nick with so much force that it knocked him off of his feet.

Evan's eyes were closed. His head tilted down towards where Nick was lying, and they opened.

Nick gasped in terror. They were glowing red.

"Hello, Nick," he said. But it wasn't Evan's true voice- beneath it, there was something horrible and monstrous.

Nick tried to say something, but couldn't. He was too scared. Evan started slowly walking towards him, and he began crawling backwards as fast as he could. Evan caught up to him and reached for his throat. Without thinking, Nick kicked upwards and struck him in the crotch. He stumbled back a bit, but was otherwise unaffected.

Nick took this moment to get up. He reached for his pistol in his holster and aimed it at Evan. "Don't take another step," he said.

Evan opened his mouth, and an inhuman shriek welled up from within the depths of his body. The sound of it chilled the very core of Nick's being. Then, with inhuman speed, he ran forward and swiped the gun from his hand.

Reacting instantly, Nick struck out and punched Evan in the face. But it was no use. Evan absorbed the blow like a sponge, and latched his hands onto Nick's throat.

"Please," Nick begged. "Don't do this."

Evan grinned. "Sorry," he said. Then he forced Nick to the ground and smashed his head to the floor, knocking him out.

He released Nick's unconscious body, and walked over to a wall. Placing both hands on it, he drew his head back and smashed it into it with all his might. His body crumpled to the floor, and the entity retreated from it.

Samantha screamed, and fell backwards. She tumbled down the stairs, flipping head over heels, and landed in a heap at the bottom.

"Samantha!" Alena yelled. She ran over to her friend and shook her, getting no response.

"Oh God, no!" she felt for a pulse in her neck, and let out a sigh of relief when she found one.

She looked up to the top of the stairs, only to see the fire spreading impossibly fast. Without a single hesitation, she grabbed onto Samantha's legs and dragged her as far away from the fire as possible.

When this was done, she stood up and looked around the room, searching for a possible escape. There was none.

They were trapped.

Matt was wandering through the woods.

He had been doing so for hours. After he had escaped the monster that had been chasing him, he realized he was alone. In his flight, he had been separated from Nick, Evan, and even Shade. Now, he wanted nothing more than to find his dragon friend, and make sure he was safe.

But much time had passed, and he hadn't even so much as made his way out of the woods.

After a few more minutes of wandering, he came across a large clearing. Stepping into it, he gazed around, looking for signs of life.

On the other side of the field, he saw a large shape moving.

Squinting, he was able to make out a large, scaly body, and huge, black wings. A Night Fury.

"Shade!" he yelled in excitement. "Over here!"

Alena sat down next to Samantha's unconscious body, and waited for the fires to come. She knew this the end.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, she remembered the black object she had found in Sam's house. With it came the feeling that she had missed something crucial.

She reached into her pocket and pulled it out, examining it. The light from the fire glinted off of it. She reflecting upon how smooth it was, and yet how natural it felt.

She took a minute to wonder what exactly it was. A stone, was her first thought. A strange stone. But something inside her told her that wasn't it.

Then, it came to her.

Shade popped into her head. More specifically, his "armor."

And then she had it.

"It's not a stone," she said to herself. "It's a scale."

Her arm slumped down and landed in a pile of dust next to her. She didn't care about it anymore. It didn't make any difference to her; she was going to die anyway.

Dustâ€¦|

Suddenly, it all made sense. Why she had felt uneasy earlier. The reason finally came to her. And suddenly, the puzzle came together in her head.

"Oh no," she said. "Oh no, no, noâ€¦| We had this all wrongâ€¦|"

Her train of thought was interrupted by a deafening, splintering sound at the top of the stairs. Water rushed down the staircase in frenzy, carrying the broken remains of the door with it, and putting out all of the fire in its path.

"What the hell?" she asked, frowning. She stood up, only to come face to face with the monster.

It was walking downstairs. For her.

She smiled at it. She didn't stop to wonder how it had found them. She didn't feel remorse. She just felt acceptance.

"Well played, my friend," she said. "Well played."

The Beast bounded over to her, and dealt a swift blow to her head. She blacked out.

Matt felt a nudge behind him, and yelped in surprise. Turning around, he came face to face with another Night Fury.

"What the hell?" he yelled. Then, he recognized him. Shade.

"Wait," he said. "If you're Shade, thanâ€¦"

Realization spread through him. He turned around the face the other Night Fury in the clearing. It was too dark out for Matt to be able to see it clearly, but he could tell that it was bigger than Shade. It walking towards them, and growled ferociously. Next to him, Shade growled in return. He stepped in front of his human, extending a protective wing.

"Shade," said Matt. "You don't have to do this."

Shade ignored him, and ran forward. The two dragons bounded across the field towards each other, and in no time, they meant, and disappeared in a frenzy of claws and growls.

Watching, Matt could barely tell who was who. Their fighting was primal, and chaotic. Drops of blood flew everywhere, as each dragon landed a blow on the other.

At first, it appeared that Shade would win. But the other dragon was bigger and stronger, and quickly gained the upper hand. Matt could only watch helplessly as Shade began to lose the fight.

Suddenly, off to the side of his vision, another movement caught his eye. He turned to see a figure next to him, covered from head to toe in a yellow hoodie and pants.

He recognized them. It was the figure from his dream. The one of the burning city, that he had had the day he met Ben.

"You," he said. "I've seen you before."

The figured ignored him, and began to charge. Matt braced himself, and drew his fist back. They met head on, each striking the other, and staggering backwards.

His opponent regained their orientation before he did. They ran forward, jumped, and kicked him in the chest midair. He flew backwards and smashed onto the ground. He tried to say something, but all that came out was a high-pitched whine; the breath had been knocked out of him.

His attacker sprinted towards him, and delivered a powerful kick to his side. They knelt down and started delivering intense blows to his face. The beating went on and onâ€¦

He realized he had lost. The only thing he could do was lie there and accept it. _These bastardsâ€|_ he thought. _They left us to die, and when we survived, they stole what was ours. And then expected us to leave them alone?_ Rage went through him, and his body was flooded with strength. _Wellâ€| I WON'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!_

With a cry of rage, he brought his knee up into his attacker's stomach, causing them to double over. Then, he used his other leg to sweep them off their feet, falling face-down into the ground.

Pushing them off, he hauled himself upright. Realizing he finally had the upper hand, he knelt on top of them, and turned them over to face him. He drew his fist back and then drove it into their face. He repeatedly punched them there, his fist raining down and bringing pain with every blow. "Leaveâ€| usâ€| alone!" he yelled, punctuating each syllable with a punch. His opponent's mask was now soaked with blood. They were still struggling to push him off, but their struggles were becoming weaker.

Suddenly, an idea came to him. He reached into his pocket, pulled out his knife, and pressed it against his opponent's throat. "Get up," he said.

He got off of them, and helped them to their feet. Then, holding them against himself, he kept the knife pressed to their throat, wiped some blood off of his bruised and bleeding face, and turned to face the two dueling dragons.

What he saw dismayed him greatly. Shade was lying under the other dragon, bloodied and unmoving. This made him even more determined to win.

"Get off of him," he yelled. "Or I will kill your friend."

The dragon looked at him, an expression of what seemed almost like remorse on their face. Then, it changed to surprise- and dread. It stepped off of Shade, and sat next to him.

"Good," said Matt. "Now stay-"

He was cut off, as a blow to the back of his head knocked him out cold.

The Man in Black stood behind him, holding his katana by the blade. "That's the last of them," he said. "We've won this fight."

He sheathed his katana, and removed his helmet, breathing in fresh air. It got so stuffy in his sometimes. He bent down to help his friend- who the boy had beaten badly, and had fallen over when he'd gone down- up.

"Are you okay, Elizabeth?" he asked.

Elizabeth nodded weakly.

"Why don't you go sit down?" he suggested.

She nodded again, and went to sit by a tree.

The Man in Black walked over to where his Night Fury friend had fought the other one, only to see a look of grief on his face.

"What's wrong, Ash?" he asked.

Ashmore looked at the bloodied, unconscious dragon next to him, and said, "It's him. I know it. I didn't realize it until just now." He looked back up to the Man in Black and said, "I did thisâ€¦"

Knowing he couldn't understand him, he dug his claw into the ground and carved "2-9" into it.

The Man in Black squinted, and looked into the ground. When he read it, his eyes widened. "Ohâ€¦" he said. "Oh. Oh God."

He ran to the dragon's side. "Help me with him, Ashmore. We'll bring him back to the house, and take care of him. Don't worry; I won't leave him to die again."

Relief spread through Ashmore. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you, Sam."

27. Chapter Twenty-Six: A Change of Plans

****Chapter Twenty-Six:****

****A Change of Plans****

****Gunnerville, New Hampshire****

Maverick had awoken on the side of the road in the middle of the day. His hair and face were streaked with dried blood, and there was a jagged cut on his arm. Around him were the bodies of his men.

He eventually made his way back to the town hall, only to find the town in chaos. Some men were fighting with each other over belongings, while others were making repairs to houses that had suffered great damage.

He had found one of his personal favorite officers and asked what was going on.

"The prisoners got away," he said. "And the Man in Black burned down the wall. A hoard of zombies got in. We were barely able to fight them off."

Fury coursed through his veins. "And Carlton?" he asked.

"Carlton's dead. They found his body by the gate. He was killed by a blade- the Man in Black, obviously. You're in charge now."

The Man in Black, Maverick thought with rage. May you be damned to Hell.

That had been two days ago. Now, on December 22nd, the day after the winter solstice, he was making plans.

"We need to rebuild first, of course," he was saying to his senior

officers. "But after thatâ€¦ We're going to go to Danville and give them all we've got. To hell with guarding the town. If we all go, there's no way he can beat us, Beast or no Beast. And then, once he's dead, we'll finish off those Atkinson fuckers too. Who's with me?"

Simultaneously, each of the soldiers let loose an "Ay!" Whether or not they agreed with him was irrelevant. They had no choice.

"And thenâ€¦" he continued. "If we can find those prisoners, then we'll rip them limb from limb."

Just then, another soldier walked in. "Sir!" he saluted. "I was on guard duty. They sent me to get you."

Maverick sighed in exasperation. "What now?" he asked.

"There's someone here to see you."

He frowned. "Someone? As in, someone from the outside?"

The soldier nodded. "Yes, sir," he said nervously.

Maverick shook his head. "I told you not to let anyone in," he said.

"I-I know, sir," he stuttered. "But he said he just wanted to talk to you. And he had a lot of heavily armed soldiers with him. They outnumbered us. We had no choice."

Maverick sighed. "Fine. Take me to him."

The soldier led him into the front room of the town hall. Sitting on a wooden bench and waiting for him was a tall, tan-skinned man of about fifty years of age. His hair was neatly trimmed and grey, and his chin was covered in thin, light grey stubble. He was dressed formally, in a long sleeved blue button-down shirt and black dress pants, with a red tie. On his nose sat a pair of eyeglasses. One of the lenses was blacked out; he only had one blue eye.

"Hello, Maverick," the man said. He stood up and offered his hand to Maverick, who refused to take it. Instead, he glared at the man.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" he asked, hostilely.

"Is that any way to treat a guest?" the man asked. In his voice was a hint of a southern accent. He laughed. "I suppose I deserve suspicion, under the circumstances."

He paused a moment to adjust his glasses. "My name is Dr. Corvus. I have a proposition I'd like to make."

Maverick was silent for a moment. Then, he said, "Well?"

Dr. Corvus started pacing back and forth slowly, clasping his hands together. "It is my understanding that your organization has come under various attacks from certain individuals in the area?"

"How do you know this?" asked Maverick suspiciously.

"Oh, we have our sources. Now, how would you like to get your revenge on these people?"

"We already have that covered, thanks."

"Well, you should listen to what I have to say. You may find itâ€¦ interestingâ€¦"

"I've heard enough," said Maverick. All of his instincts told him not to trust this man. It wasn't the man himself, so much as his outfit. Anyone who would dress that formally after a zombie apocalypse isn't someone who really knows what's going on.

He turned to walk out of the room, when Dr. Corvus said something that made him stop. "What I'm about to offer you is a chance that you will never get again."

Maverick slowly turned around. He still didn't trust Corvus, but his curiosity was piqued. "What is it?" he asked.

Corvus ignored his question. "If you want revenge, the most efficient way would be to join my army. If you do, the rewards will beâ€¦ enormous. You will have your revenge. And you will have power. Power beyond anything you could possibly hope to have here."

"What would you have me do?" asked Maverick.

Corvus spread his arms. "It's simple," he stated. "Join our army. Relocate your people to our base, and do whatever we tell you. In return, you will have your revenge, and you- and I mean you, not your people- will have a permanent seat of power."

Maverick stroked his chin in thought. "That is an excellent proposal," he said. "But there is one flaw in your reasoning."

"And what is that?" asked Corvus.

"This is the most power I can have. The world is in ruins. It can never go back to the way it was. There are no more countries. The only governments exist in small towns like these. What you're promising me is a fool's errand."

Corvus only chuckled. "You misunderstand the purpose of my organization. We aren't trying to give you power in this worldâ€¦ but in a new one. This hell is the dust of a crumpled world. And it is our job to build a new one from the wreckage. If you help us succeed- and we will succeed- you will be granted a position of high power in this new world. For the rest of your life."

Maverick stroked his chin again. "Now, thatâ€¦." He said. "That's tempting. What's the catch?"

"I've already told you," Corvus replied. "All you need to do is relocate your men to our headquarters. Of course, you would need to go through a month's worth of training-"

"We're trained enough, thank you."

"Not to our standards. We're a real, professionally trained army, and

we won't accept imperfection. We must make sure you are in top form before you can fight for us."

"That's fair," said Maverick. It made sense. He himself was fine, but some of his soldiers weren't exactly the best fighters on the planet.

"How do I know you're not lying to me?"

A puzzled expression crossed Corvus's face. "Now why would I do that?"

"I don't know. But how do I know you aren't?"

"I give you my word that I'm not."

Maverick stared deep into the man's eyes, trying to find any sign of deception. He decided that the doctor was telling the truth.

He offered his hand. "I'm in," he said. "When do we start?"

Corvus grabbed his hand and firmly shook it. "We'll come back to get you in two days. Until then, make the necessary preparations."

With that, Corvus walked towards the door. "Goodbye, Chris. I'll see you soon."

Maverick offered a friendly salute, and then Corvus was gone. Slowly, he walked back into the conference room.

"Men," he announced. "There's been a change of plansâ€¦"

****End of Part One****

* * *

><p>So, what did you think of that?

****Part Two will begin sometime next week- either on Wednesday or next Sunday. I'm taking this Sunday off- sorry for that, but I need it. Then, this story will continue.****

****Part Two will bring some much different things... I can tell you that much. I look forward to sharing it with you guys.****

****In the meantime, tell me what you think so far!****

28. Chapter Twenty-Seven: Two Pasts: Part 1

****So, sorry I'm a day late.****

****Anyway, here's the next chapter, and the beginning of Part Two! Unfortunately, I'm gonna leave you guys hanging a bit longer. This chapter doesn't answer the last's cliffhanger. But it does tell the first half of a pretty interesting story...****

****Hope you guys like it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Night Furies.****

* * *

><p>Part Two:

****Seekers****

****Chapter Twenty-Seven:****

****Two Past: Part One****

****March 14, 2014****

****Somewhere in Kansas****

The day started like any other; in a quite literal sense. For the Night Furies in the lab, almost every day was the same. For Ashmore and 2-9, their days consisted of talking and planning.

They planned their escape. It was all that they really talked about anymore. Their desire to escape was so intense, Ashmore was surprised the others couldn't feel it radiating off of them.

The only problem was, they didn't really know how to go about escaping.

The first step would be to find an opportunity and attack the scientists when they came for them. The second would be to get the other one out, if they weren't already, and find a way out of the lab, fighting the guards and scientists where they had to. That was as far as they had gotten. They were stumped.

But, as it turned out, they didn't need to plan. The opportunity was about to present itself, and things would unravel from there.

It was about midday- or what they felt was midday- when it happened. Ashmore and 2-9 were talking, as usual, when the sirens started.

At first, they dismissed it as nothing. There had been sirens before, but they were almost always a drill. But then, a few minutes later, they heard the gunshots, and the screams.

"What's going on up there?" asked Ashmore.

2-9 shook his head. "I don't know," he said.

After a few more minutes of this, the power went out.

Nervous and excited murmurs spread among the Night Furies. Ashmore and 2-9 immediately met each other's eyes. The power never went out. This could be their chance!

Excitement rose up in Ashmore's chest. He eagerly waited for what was going to happen next.

He was kept waiting for a while, until finally, a lone scientist burst through the doors. He was tall and young, with blood streaming down his face and through his blond hair. All of the Night Furies were immediately quiet as they watched. They had never seen any of the scientists act like this before.

He looked over his shoulder, and screamed at what he saw. The sound of horrible, inhuman moans coming from the hallway reached Ashmore's ears. The scientist, in a panic, pulled out a key ring.

He looked at the first key he grabbed, and then ran down to Ashmore's cage. The dragon's heart leapt as he watched the human unlocking his prison.

The scientist opened the cage and ran backwards. "Help! Please!" he yelled. "Kill them!" He pointed to a group of humans entering the room.

Ashmore stepped out of his cage and faced the group. He could immediately tell that something was wrong. The faces of these humans were pale, and their eyes empty, save for an all-consuming hunger. Blood covered their jaw and dripped from their lips, and horrific, inhuman moans were streaming from their throats. Their pace was slow and ragged.

One sniff told him everything he needed to know. These were not humans. Not anymore.

He let out a fierce growl and bounded down to them. The one in the lead uttered a blood-curdling hiss, and began stumbling towards Ashmore. The dragon met him, and his instincts took over. With a single slash of his claws, the monster's throat was slit. Blood poured out of the cut, but still the monster kept coming.

All eyes in the room were on them. "Ashmore!" 2-9 yelled. "Be careful!"

The words barely registered with him. He was staring in horror at the monstrosity in front of him. Its arms were outstretched, and it was trying to grab him.

How is it still alive?

"The head!" the scientist behind him yelled. "Get the head!"

Ashmore didn't hesitate. With a single blow, he clawed the monster's head open. Blood and brains seeped out, and the monster fell.

Ashmore sniffed the corpse and determined that it was dead. Then, he turned to the others.

They were almost upon him. Four of them. He slashed out, spilling their blood, until each and every one of them was dead.

The passion of battle died down, and Ashmore sat on his hind legs, observing his work. He felt strange. He had never killed before.

But he wasn't regretful. The creatures he had killed had been dead already. Their scent reeked of it. They were nothing but monstrosities.

"Thank you!" the scientist said, gasping in relief. He went up to Ashmore and ordered, "Now, get back in your cage please."

Ashmore turned around and stared at him in shock. And then, it came to him- his chance had come.

"No," he said. He extended his teeth, and contorted his face in a fearsome growl.

The scientist got the message. Without backup, he was helpless. And if he had a tranquilizer, he must have forgotten it.

"Okay, okay!" he said, and fled the room. The door slammed behind him, and Ashmore heard the lock turn.

That doesn't matter, he thought. _We can take care of that easily_.

He turned around and faced 2-9, ignoring all the other Night Furies who were staring at him in awe. "This is our chance," he said. "The power's out and they seem to have an infestation of sorts. They'll have no way of knowing we're escaping until we're gone."

2-9 nodded. "Can you break through this?" he asked, gesturing with his tail to the steel mesh of the cage.

"I can try," Ashmore replied. He opened his mouth and latched onto the lock. He pulled back with all of his might. The metal dug into his mouth, drawing blood, but he kept going. Finally, it gave way and broke off.

2-9's door was unlocked. Ashmore spat the broken lock out of his mouth, and it crashed to the floor with a loud _clang_. "Come on," he said.

2-9 pushed the door open and stepped out into the hallway. "Let's get out of here," he said.

Around them, the Night Furies were starting to break their silence. "Help!" one demanded. "Let us out!"

Others simply sat there, watching. Others still turned away. They thought it was a lost cause.

"We can't leave without helping them," said 2-9. He turned to the Night Fury on the other side of him, a female named 2-10. She was one of the ones who wanted his help.

"If I help you out," he said, "Will you help some of the others?"

She nodded. "Yes, of course."

"Okay." 2-9 opened his jaws, unsheathed his teeth, and bit down on the lock. After a minute of prying the metal apart and slicing up his gums, the lock finally broke. He dropped it on the ground and stepped aside, allowing 2-10 to leave.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you so much."

"Anything for a fellow dragon," 2-9 replied. "Good luck. Maybe we'll meet again outside."

With that, he walked over to Ashmore. "Let's go," he said.

They approached the locked door. While it was made of metal, with the power out it was still no challenge for them. Ashmore, being the bigger of the two, charged it head-on, smashing into it with all of his strength. The blow threw him off balance, but the door flew right out of the threshold and clanged against the wall behind it.

They emerged from their dark, cramped prison into the hallway outside. Up until now, they had never seen anything apart from their cages, the testing rooms, and the infirmary. What they saw now wasn't much different from the latter two; the walls were sleek and chrome. Electric lights on the ceiling spread up and down the hallway. As the power was off, they offered no light.

"Which way?" asked 2-9.

"Iâ€¦ I'm not sure," Ashmore replied. "Which way seems right to you?"

2-9 sniffed around for a moment, trying to determine which way was out. "I can't decide. Let's just pick one."

"Alright." Ashmore started walking right. 2-9 followed.

They walked for several minutes. The hallway twisted and turned, leading all over the place. There were a few more times where they had to decide between two paths. They had no way of knowing if they were going the right way or not. They didn't see any signs of life; although there were dead bodies scattered around on the floor.

"What do you think happened?" asked 2-9.

"I don't know," said Ashmore. "But I do know that whatever killed these people is still here. And judging from what happened earlier, we don't want to meet it."

2-9 was about to reply, when they heard a noise from somewhere close to them. They had heard it only once before, during a particularly nasty incident between some security guards and a Night Fury, but it was enough for them to know exactly what it was.

Gunfire. And lots of it.

The gunfire was punctuated by a roar of pain. Even from this distance, they could tell it was a Night Fury.

"They found them," said Ashmore. He had to fight off panic. "They found them. We have to get out of here!"

"Just stay calm," 2-9 reassured him. "We have to get out of this hallway. They'll find us for sure if we don't. We-"

He was cut off as a moan echoed down the hallway, accompanied by the sickening stench of death. They both looked towards the sound and saw several more of the monsters that Ashmore had battled before stumbling down the hallway.

"Let's not go that way," said Ashmore. The two of them turned around, only to come face to face with another threat.

A human had wandered around the corner. But it wasn't just any human. It was an armed guard.

He saw the dragons and yelled, "There! More of them!" Immediately, several more came around the corner and aimed at them.

"Oh no," said Ashmore. Then, he got an idea. He turned around and launched a ball of fire at the monsters.

They were blown backwards by the explosion. Bloody body parts scattered through the hallway, as almost all of them were obliterated. Ashmore coughed as a thick black smoke began streaming from his throat.

"Run!" 2-9 yelled. The two of them bolted down the hallway as the guards started to fire. The bullets barely missed them as they passed the monsters and turned the corner. Except one.

A burning, ripping pain shot through Ashmore's left leg. He roared in pain, and almost fell over. He would have, if 2-9 hadn't supported him.

"It's okay," he said. "You're okay. Just keep going.

"There's a staircase right there," said Ashmore. So there was. It was about halfway down the hall from them, and led to the upper level.

They bounded down the hall towards it and entered the stairwell, flapping their wings as much as they could in the tight space to help their ascent. They came to another floor, but they passed it. They could hear shooting in the distance.

They made it up another story before they heard the guards enter the stairwell far below them. Their footsteps were loud, as their boots smashed against the metal floor.

"Faster!" Ashmore said weakly. He was being pushed to his limits. He could barely keep up because of the pain in his leg.

They ran up several more stories before they finally deemed it safe. There was chaos everywhere. On every floor there were screams and gunshots. Finally, they came to one that was quiet.

The dragons exited the stairwell, and the guards were close behind. Suddenly, Ashmore picked up a scent, one that he had never smelled before. But one he knew immediately.

Outside.

His instincts recognized the smell, _longed _for it. "We're on the right floor," he said. He began limping forward. "This way!"

Suddenly, their path was blocked by more guards. But they didn't fire. They seemed to be waiting for someone.

"Well?" a voice asked. A gap in the line of guards appeared, and Dr. Corvus emerged from it.

"You," 2-9 growled.

"What are you waiting for? Kill them."

The guards aimed and prepared to fire. Without hesitation, Ashmore opened his mouth and prepared his bolt. But when he shot, no fire came out. Instead, a thick cloud of black smoke streamed from his gullet. He broke out in a coughing fit, as the smoke bit at the back of his throat.

No! he thought. _Not now!_

There was an explosion at the other side of the hallway, and the guards screamed. 2-9 closed his jaws and turned to Ashmore.

"Get out of here," he said. "The guards in the stairs will be here, and we'll be cornered. There are a lot more of them. You're in no condition to fight right now."

He was right. It usually took minutes for Ashmore to get over a smoke incident. And on top of that, he was wounded. But he didn't want to leave his only friend.

He shook his head. "No," he coughed. "I'm notâ€¦ leaving you."

"Yes you are," said 2-9. "Go!"

"Noâ€¦" he broke out in another coughing fit.

The guards were arriving at the top of the stairs. 2-9 made a decision. He rammed himself against Ashmore, pushing him towards where the guards had fallen. Ashmore struggled, but in his weakened state he was no match.

They reached the end of the hallway, and the guards had finally reached the top of the stairs. 2-9 shot a bolt of fire, killing the first few that had appeared and disorienting the rest, buying them time. "Go!" he growled. "Please! Do this for me."

Ashmore realized there was no arguing with him. "Okay," he said. He stared into his friend's eyes. "Good luck, 2-9."

2-9's tail wrapped around his friend's shoulders in an embrace. "You too," he said.

With that, he turned back. Something caught his eye on the ground. "Hey, look who's still alive," he said, approaching it.

The last thing Ashmore saw before he left was 2-9's claw embedded in Dr. Corvus's right eye socket. And as he limped down the hallway, the human's agonized screams followed him.

After a few minutes, Ashmore finally got out.

He burst through the double doors, nearly shattering them, and emerged into a blinding white light. He had to squint for a few minutes to adjust to it. When he finally did, he saw the source of the light. The sun.

He had dreamed of seeing the sun since he was a hatchling. It was far more beautiful than he could have imagined. He stared at the deep blue sky with wonder.

The throbbing in his leg broke through. He turned to examine it. In his left hind leg, a good-sized chunk of flesh was missing. He was trailing blood, but it wasn't as bad as it felt. He sniffed it, and sighed in relief. The metal had just grazed him.

When he was done, he looked at his surroundings. The building was circled by what looked like a cage, with curly wires attached to the top. On the wires were sharp spikes. The ground was covered in a hard, rough stone, and white lines were scattered across it. Several strange machines lay idle on top of the rock. Some of them were on fire, others were intact. More bodies and blood were strewn around, but it seemed the violence had stopped here, for the time being.

In the distance, he heard screaming and gunfire, but it was far away. He breathed in the fresh air. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted. An armada of new scents barraged his nostrils; so many he was almost overwhelmed.

His trance was soon broken, however, as he heard a new sound. The guards in the lab were at the entrance, and were almost within seeing distance. He had to move. He decided he would find somewhere to hide. Somewhere he could be safe, and wait for 2-9.

The realization came to him then. He was going to fly.

Of all the things he had wanted to do in life, flying was at the top of the list. He couldn't believe he was finally doing it. His instincts took over once more, and he charged at the gate as fast as he could with the limp, flapping his wings. When he decided he was going fast enough, he leapt. For a second, he thought he was going to fall. He pounded his wings, trying as hard as he could to stay in the air. His tail whipped forward, helping to keep him afloat. Finally, he obtained steady flight.

He soared over the gate, just as the guards ran out of the lab. They saw him and started shooting, but by now he was going too fast. He soared above the world, watching the ground shrink beneath him as he went to join the sky.

He was free.

****Opelucid, Vermont****

This can't be happening.

Those were the words going through Sam's head as he sat in his family's car. Or, it used to be his family's, but now it was only his.

They were dead. They were all dead.

First, his sister. While he had been fleeing his school, he had met up with her, only to witness her brutal death. Then he had made it home, only to find his parents' corpses. From the looks of it, they had arrived home before he had, but had accidentally let a zombie into the house. Sam found it, and killed it in pure rage.

For a while, he couldn't bring himself to do anything. He just sat there sobbing. Then, he forced himself to think, and something came to him.

He had family nearby. His cousin, Kaegan. If he could get to him, he might be safe. He would be better off than if he was alone.

He packed a few things into his backpack; his DS, his PokÃ©mon games (he never went anywhere without them), his iPod, his drawing folder, a book, and some food and drink. Then, he found the keys to the truck, and let himself in to the driver's seat.

That's where he was now. The tears were still coming, and he was struggling to force himself to turn the key.

He lifted his glasses up and wiped the tears away from his eyes. This is all a dream, he reasoned. It has to be. What's happening is impossible.

But he knew deep down that it wasn't.

He gave himself one final push, and was able to turn the key. The engine flared to life. Sam shifted the gear into reverse and backed out of the driveway.

He didn't like driving. The only reason he did was because he had to, and even then he tried to do it as little as possible. He viewed cars as nothing more than giant metal deathtraps.

He started driving down the street, trying to ignore the carnage. Cars were wrecked all over the place. Dead bodies were strewn about, and the streets were stained red. The zombies- he determined that that's what they were- wandered here and there, enjoying the buffet that had been set up for them.

He drove for a while. Eventually, he lost track of the time. He became lost inside of himself, only aware of his thoughts and the outline of the road ahead. And for a while, he thought of nothing. Nothing except for his destination.

Fifteen minutes passed until his car suddenly started sputtering. He was startled from his trance, and looked at the dashboard. The car was out of gas.

"No!" he yelled as the car began to slow down. "Damn it!"

The engine gave one last cough, and then stopped. Sam slammed the dashboard in anger, and slumped over. "Great," he said. "Just great."

After a minute, he slung his backpack over his shoulder and exited the car. "I always knew you couldn't be trusted," he said to the vehicle.

He took out his iPod, put it in his earphones, and started walking. He wasn't really in the mood for music, but it was something to do other than walk. He kept it low, in case a zombie tried to sneak up on him.

As the dark opening notes of John Powell's "This Is Berk" began, his mood was slightly uplifted. His favorite music was soundtrack music, and his favorite soundtrack of them all was that of How to Train Your Dragon. Despite all that had happened, the music was still able to distract him.

After several minutes of walking, he came to a corpse lying in the middle of the road. It was the corpse of a woman. That was all he could tell. The body was so mutilated, no other features had survived. She was holding a baseball bat. It looked as if she had been trying to fight off her killers.

Sam paused his music, which was now "The Downed Dragon" and silently gave his condolences to the woman. Then he picked up the bloody baseball bat and cleaned it off on the grass on the side of the road. It might come in handy later.

Almost an hour later, he was still walking. The epic sound of "Battling the Green Death" blared into his ears. Suddenly, at the edge of his vision, he saw a car coming.

He put his music on pause, and waited to see who it was. Maybe they could help him.

As the car drew closer, he began to grow hopeful. The car was familiar. Kaegan's family owned one just like it.

The car got even closer, and started to slow down. When it got close enough for him to see who the driver was, his jaw dropped. The tall, bulky figure with short, reddish hair was unmistakable. It was Kaegan after all.

He stopped the car and rolled down the window. "Sam!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing all the way out here?"

"Kaegan!" he replied in relief. "Thank God you're alive. I was on my way to see if you were okay."

"Well get in the car, before any zombies show up!"

Sam walked around to the passenger's seat, opened the door, and took a seat. He placed his backpack on his lap and put his iPod in his pocket.

"Are you okay?" Kaegan asked.

"Yeah," Sam replied. "Butâ€¦ My familyâ€¦"

"Did the zombies get them?"

"Yâ€¦yeahâ€¦" Sam sniffed, fighting back tears.

"Fuck," Kaegan swore. "Same with mineâ€¦ FUCK!"

He rolled up the window and started driving. "At least we're both alive," he said.

"Yeah, butâ€¦ what's going to happen next? This all happened so fast..."

Kaegan shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "I heard that they've started to set up shelters to keep survivors safe. The government's hoping to get this under control soon, and they want us to go there so they can protect us. I was thinking we should listen to them."

Sam nodded. "Where's the nearest one?"

"Burlington."

"Let's go, then. It sounds like our best bet."

Kaegan turned on the radio. A deep, male voice spoke from it.

"...to the nearest shelter. A list of shelters in the area will be broadcasted shortly. Wait there until the situation is under control. The government is estimating two weeks at most until the threat is eliminated. The shelters are as followsâ€¦"

****Somewhere in Kansas****

Many days had passed since they escaped the lab. Ashmore hid in several different abandoned buildings- after that day there were a lot to choose from, as many people had abandoned their homes. Whenever people raided the house, he would try to sneak out the backdoor. If he couldn't, he knocked them out and left to find another shelter. His wound bothered him, but it hadn't been too deep, and it had stopped bleeding. The pain had lessened over the days.

While he was waiting for 2-9 on that first day, he had seen a few Night Furies escaping, but none of them had been his friend. He had frequently flown around the area under the cover of night, searching for any signs of the smaller dragon. But he had found nothing.

Until about four days later.

He had been searching, when his stomach began rumbling. The past few days, he had instinctively taken up hunting, and loved it. Now, he knew it was time to feed again.

The scent of deer hit his nostrils, and he banked to the right, trying to pinpoint its location. Eventually, he located it and dived.

He was on it before it even knew what happened. He dug his claws into the deer's flesh, pulled it up, and delivered a sharp bite to its neck, killing it instantly. He then found a good spot to land and feed.

He began feasting on his kill. At first, he didn't pick up on the smell that bathed the area. He was absorbed in the scent and flavor of his meal. But when he was finished and resting for a few minutes to let his food digest, he smelled it.

Night Fury.

He became immediately alert. Upon further investigation, he determined the owner of the scent.

2-9. He had been here. He had gotten out after all.

Ashmore could barely contain his excitement. The smell was fresh; he had been here recently.

2-9 was alive.

He immediately tried to track the scent. But that was as far as he got. The scent disappeared quickly; 2-9 must've flown off.

Ashmore was disappointed. But he didn't give up. For days afterward, he dedicated all of his time to flying around and looking for 2-9. But it wasn't to be.

Now, here he was. The area he was in was completely void of humans. The "zombies" as he had heard them called had either killed them all or driven them off. But they had not gotten rid of him.

The city he was living in was becoming more and more dangerous. He was starting to have more close calls with the zombies than before. When there were only a few of them, they were no match for him, but when they wandered in giant hordes, they were a problem. Especially if they caught him on the ground. Live prey was becoming scarce quickly, thus forcing him to scavenge. Sometimes, while he was doing that, they would sneak up on him.

To top it off, he hadn't found a single trace of 2-9 since that night. Part of him was starting to think his friend had moved on; whether that meant he was dead or just gone, he didn't know. This left him with a choice to make.

Should he stay here and risk getting killed, or move, find somewhere safe, and hope that he would find his friend some day?

He spent hours struggling with the decision. 2-9 was his only friend in the world; he couldn't just leave him behind. But he wasn't even sure if he was still here, and he had to look after himself as well.

Eventually, the answer came to him in the form of a memory. As he was trying to fall asleep one night, he was thinking about their days together in the lab. This train of thought led to memories of their plans to escape.

And then it hit him.

New Hampshire!

His eyes shot wide open, and a grin spread across his scaly lips. He and 2-9 had always talked about going to New Hampshire. That was where the scientists had said their center of operations was, and that was where they'd go to take them down. Ashmore knew that if 2-9 was still alive, and had given up finding him, he would go there.

The next morning, he got up, found some food, and then went looking for 2-9 one last time. He spent most of the day doing that, with no luck. Then, letting his instincts tell him which way to go, he turned his tail to the towns that had been his home for the past few weeks,

and flew to his new destination.

New Hampshire.

****Burlington, Vermont****

_"â€|__evacuation is in progress. The Kansas state police department has been well at work rescuing people and eliminating the monsters. But is that all that's going on here?_"

_"__As was revealed before, a virus that was supposedly 'accidentally' created by government scientists escaped from several secret laboratories across the country. But was that the only thing that escaped? New evidence suggests not._"

_"__Many reports of another, much bigger potential threat are emerging. From all over the state, sightings of strange creatures have been coming in. Nobody has been able to see exactly what these creatures look like, except that they are large, dark-colored, and have the ability to fly. They are incredibly fast and agile, and only seem to come out at night. Whether or not these creatures mean us harm is as of yet unknown._"

_"__Authorities ask that if you see any of these creatures, report-_"_

"Why do you keep watching this?"

The sound of Kaegan's voice cut through Sam's concentration, bringing him back to the world.

Three weeks had passed since the day now dubbed "Z-Day." Three weeks. That was all it took.

The government had promised to clean up after itself. Instead, they lost over half the country in just three weeks. The northwest coast was all that was left, and even that wasn't safe.

The shelters were being overrun in Vermont. In fact, Burlington was the only city left. Just the day before, an alarm had gone off, and the inhabitants of the shelter had to arm up. A few of the residents had contracted the virus, and after they were disposed of, the military examined everyone. Sam and Kaegan had passed, but not everyone else had. They had no idea what had happened to those that had failed.

Nerves were at a high. They had been increasing at an alarming rate, even before the incident. Disappearances had been reported, and while the military did their best to search everywhere, the hotel the shelter was located in was massive. At least once a day, a zombie was found and killed within the building. And even though most people didn't like to admit it, deep down inside, they all knew they were losing the fight.

Sam and Kaegan were in their room on the fifth floor. It was morning, and Sam was watching a recording of a national news report from Kansas that was from only a couple days after the outbreak. The creatures mentioned in the report intrigued him. He wasn't sure exactly what they were, but the description made him think of dragons. The reason he kept watching it was because while the

reporter, a tall, thin Asian woman with long, black hair, was describing the reports, a video clip was played. It was the only documented sighting of the creatures.

It showed a dark, night sky. There was nothing at first, but then, just above the treetops, a large, dark shape darted across. It was too fast to make out anything on first glance, but after several viewings Sam decided it looked more and more like a black dragon.

He ignored Kaegan's question. "Do you think there are creatures like that in the labs around here?"

"I don't know," replied Kaegan. "Frankly, I don't even think that's real. I think people were scared, saw something weird and created a story from it."

"Then how do you explain that footage?" Sam asked.

Kaegan shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "But anyway, I'm hungry. Let's go grab something to eat."

Sam sighed, and turned the TV off. He checked the clock and saw that it was 12:30. He wasn't that hungry, but he figured he should probably eat _something._ He hadn't had breakfast.

They exited their room and made their way down the hall. It was deserted except for a few military men making their patrols. Sam nodded to them as they passed.

When they reached the elevator, Kaegan pressed the down button and waited. When the elevator arrived, it was empty. They stepped inside and pressed the button to go to the ground floor.

The doors closed and the elevator lurched downward. They rode in silence until the third floor, where the elevator shuddered to a halt. The lights flickered out.

"Oh come on!" Kaegan replied. "Not again!"

The power had been frequently going out over the past week. The blackouts usually only lasted for a few minutes at most, but for people who were in the elevator, those few minutes were a huge annoyance.

But something was wrong this time. They waited patiently for the power to come back on. But after a few minutes, it was still off.

"What the hell?" asked Kaegan. "This is the longest one yet."

For what seemed like forever, they waited. After another few minutes, Sam began to feel dread welling up in his chest.

What if it doesn't come back?

He didn't have to worry about that, however. About a minute later, the hum of electricity passed through the elevator, and the lights flickered back on. Sam realized he had been holding his breath, and let it out in relief.

And then, the sirens.

As the elevator lurched down again, speakers that had been placed throughout the halls and in the rooms and elevators began broadcasting a high-pitched, ear-splitting wail. Sam and Kaegan winced, and dread spread through their bodies like poison.

The siren stopped, and a woman's voice replaced it. _"Everyone in the shelter must report to the lobby immediately. This is not a drill. I repeat; this is not a drill."_ The woman's voice disappeared, and was replaced by the siren.

Sam and Kaegan looked at each other in shock. "Again!" Sam shouted. "What is this time?"

Kaegan shook his head. "I don't know!"

They made their way to the lobby, where a crowd was forming. Looking around, Sam realized with a shock exactly how many people were missing. The population of the shelter had almost halved since they arrived. Even worse, some people were starting to become sick. With what, nobody was sure.

As the last survivors made their way into the lobby, the woman who had spoken over the speakers stepped in front of them. Surrounding her were a number of heavily armed soldiers. She was a tall, skinny African-American with her hair braided in a large ponytail.

"Ladies and gentleman!" she shouted. "Can I have your attention please?"

The murmuring in the lobby quieted down as the survivors looked up at the woman. "There's been an incident at the city borders," she began. She hesitated for a moment, as if trying to decide what to say next. "The zombies have broken through the military's lines."

Immediately, cries and screams of panic erupted throughout the room. "Quiet!" she yelled. "Everybody calm down!"

Her audience quieted down as they watched her closely.

"We don't know how this happened," she said. "But what we do know is that we have troops in the city fighting them off. If all goes well, you'll barely even know it's happening.

"However, if something _does _happen, and the zombies get through, an evacuation will take place. Everyone will receive a weapon again from the armory. If the zombies reach the hotel, we'll sound the alarm, and everyone will have to leave. Once you do, get out of the city as fast as you can, and try to get to New Hampshire or Massachusetts. Nowhere in Vermont will be safe. If this shelter falls, than Burlington falls. And if Burlington falls, Vermont falls."

Panic spread through the room in the form of many outbursts and murmurs. The woman had to once again calm everyone down. Once she did, she explained the rest of the plan.

"Everyone is to report to the armory at once," she said. "You will receive your protection there."

The crowd was herded down the stairs that were once reserved for employees only. They led into the basement of the hotel, which was now being used to store weapons. When they were down there, some soldiers began distributing guns to the frightened civilians.

When it came Sam's turn, he reluctantly received a handgun from the soldier. Kaegan received a pump-action shotgun. Then, they were given some ammo clips. When they were let out, they headed for the stairs—skipping the elevator, as they did not want to be trapped in it again.

"I hate guns," Sam commented.

"I know," Kaegan replied. "But you'll just have to make do."

"Unfortunately."

They returned to their room and waited. To pass the time, Sam took out his 3DS and started playing Pokémon Black. He was currently in the middle of a shiny Mawile hunt.

For the next hour they sat there. Kaegan left to get some food at one point. He returned with lunch for both of them; two ham and cheese sandwiches with potato chips.

The mood was tense. The sounds of gunshots in the city were getting closer and closer. But they eventually were able to chase it away with conversation.

"So, let's say the shelter does get overrun," said Kaegan.

"Can we not talk about that?" Sam asked.

"No, wait. Assuming it does. What are we going to do?"

Sam shrugged. "See if they let us into New Hampshire. I'm worried about my friends back there. I want to make sure they're okay."

"That sounds like a good idea. But I have a better one."

"And what's that?"

"Church Street."

Despite all that was going on, Sam couldn't help but laugh. "You can't be serious," he said. "You want to go running around in the middle of Opelucid with nothing but a baseball bat?"

"Might as well," said Kaegan. "I mean, the world's already over. We might even die tomorrow. Why not live a little?"

Sam chuckled. "You do have a point." He stopped for a moment to watch an egg he was hatching. It wasn't shiny. "I guess we could do that."

Suddenly, the speakers turned on. Sam had just a moment to pick up on the faint static before the woman's voice blared through.

"Everyone, evacuate through the back of the building now! We have been overrun! I repeat, we've been overrun!"

Screams started echoing through the hallways as people ran from their rooms down the halls. Sam and Kaegan looked at each other in dread, and then left their room in a hurry.

What they saw in the hallway outside was horrifying. People were scrambling for their lives. They pushed each other aside with their fists, their guns, their bodies. Whenever someone fell, they were trampled.

Sam and Kaegan tried to stay with the crowd and not get pushed over. A couple of times, they were almost separated by people trying to get past them. When they made it to the stairs, people were pushed down, flipping head over heels, breaking their arms, legs, and necks. Those who weren't ran over them.

They managed to make it down the first flight of stairs without being harmed. They were being forced to run, and several times Sam almost tripped. It would've been disastrous if he had.

After what felt like a lifetime of this, the mob finally made it to the bottom of the stairs. When the first few people reached the first floor, the sound of gunfire echoed through the stairwell. The screaming intensified, and blood began spraying against the walls. As of now, it was only zombie blood.

Sam and Kaegan finally reached the bottom. Kaegan yanked Sam out of the crowd. "This way!" he yelled. "It's not safe in this mob!"

They passed countless dead, bloody zombie corpses as they made their way through the halls of the hotel, looking for the back entrance. After a few corners, they came face to face with a large group of live zombies.

"Oh shit!" Kaegan exclaimed. He lifted his gun and fired.

The lead zombie's chest exploded and it fell to the ground. Kaegan pumped his shotgun and fired again. "Come on!" he yelled. "Help me!"

Sam reluctantly drew his pistol and fired. He was no good with guns, but the zombies were crowding up the hallway, and as of now it was almost impossible to miss. The bullet hit a zombie in the arm. Blood dripped, but it kept coming.

The recoil made him stumble back, but he fired again. Next to him, Kaegan's shotgun filled the room with thunderous reports. Everytime he fired, Sam winced as the noise deafened him.

Eventually, they managed to cut down the horde to half its original size. Sam pulled a clip out of his pocket, ejected the spent one, and reloaded. Next to him, Kaegan was going through the agonizingly slow process of reloading his shotgun.

Sam looked up the hallway past the zombies and saw more coming around the corner. _We can't hold them all off_, he realized. He looked around for an escape, and saw that they were in a hallway with some

guest rooms in it.

"Screw this!" he yelled, running up to one of the doors. He tried to open it, only to find that it was locked. So instead, he shot the lock off.

The door slid open a crack, and Sam pushed it the rest of the way. "Come on!" he yelled as he ran into the room.

Kaegan followed him, as they ran into an unused hotel room. But they didn't care about that; what they cared about was the window on the far side.

Looking out it, they saw the back yard and the city beyond. The sound of zombie moans behind them was getting louder, and as Sam looked over his shoulder, he saw them entering the room.

"We have to get out of here!" he yelled.

Kaegan nodded, and lifted his gun. With a heave, he swung the butt into the window and shattered it.

Sam cleared some of the broken glass away from the window sill, and hauled himself over it, dropping onto the ground beneath. Kaegan followed, and they began sprinting away from the hotel. From inside, they could hear more screams and gunshots. Nobody else had gotten out yet. There were some zombies scattered across the lawn, but they were too slow and too far away. They wouldn't be able to catch them.

After a full minute of running, they stopped to catch their breath. It was then that the truth fully dawned on them.

Burlington was gone. And Vermont was gone as well.

They were now all alone.

****Somewhere in Kansas****

Ashmore looked at the body between his feet, as tears were welling up in his eyes and trailing down his scaly cheeks.

It hadn't been more than a day since he had decided to leave. He had flown past the towns and cities he had called his home without so much as a second glance. But just as it was getting dark, and he was looking for a place to land, he heard a noise.

A Night Fury's roar. And from the sound of it, it was in trouble.

He flew around frantically, trying to locate the source of the sound. Finally, his dragon eyes caught movement on the ground. The sound seemed to be coming from there as well.

He banked, and flew towards the noise. Landing about ten feet from the downed dragon, he quickly assessed the situation. What he saw was horrifying.

There was a large, writhing, roaring heap lying on the ground. Zombies were crawling all over it. The dragon was desperately trying to knock them off, but to no avail.

Ashmore immediately transition to battle mode. Roaring in fury, he pounced, claws and teeth extended. He felt his claws sink into flesh as he ripped the zombies away from the Night Fury. He tried his best to get their heads, but when he didn't, he turned around and slashed them open when they came back for another try.

Finally, they were all dead. The passion died within him, as he approached the barely-conscious dragon.

He could barely tell from looking at her, but underneath the scent of the blood her scent was that of a female.

She was a mess. Her scales had been torn off in most places, and her flesh was gouged open. Some of her organs had been ripped out, and were lying on the ground next to her. It was clear that she wouldn't be alive for much longer.

Ashmore knelt down next to her and saw that her eyes were still open. "Hey," he said, trying to hold back his grief. "What's your name?"

She opened her mouth and struggled to speak. At first, no words came out. Finally, she was able to manage two words. "2-10," she said.

2-10. The dragoness 2-9 had rescued. Ashmore had barely known her, but her death was causing him more grief than he had ever felt at one time. He wasn't sure why; maybe it was because he was seeing a fellow Night Fury die. Or maybe it was because he could've saved her, if only he had been there a little earlier.

"Theyâ€| snuck upâ€| on me," she choked.

Ashmore hushed her. "Save your energy," he said.

2-10 shook her head. "It'sâ€| okay," she said. "I know I'mâ€| dying."

Ashmore could have told her she was wrong. He could have said she would be okay. But she wouldn't be, and they both knew it.

Instead, he looked her in the eyes as a tear rolled down his face. "I'm sorry," he said. "If I had just been here a little earlierâ€|"

"No," she said. "It'sâ€| okay. You did yourâ€| best. Thank you forâ€| being here with me. At least nowâ€| I won't die alone."

Ashmore was softly crying by this point. "You're not alone," he said. He knelt down next to her and draped a protective wing over her. "I'm here for you."

"Thankâ€| you," she said. Then, her eyes seemed to focus on something off in the distance. And just like that, she was dead.

He stood back up and looked over her body. Tears were dripping from his eyes and landing on her bloodied face. Slowly, he lifted his paw and placed it on her. Gripping her eyelids with his claws, he pulled them shut.

"I'm sorry," he sobbed. "If only I had gotten here earlierâ€|"

An idea came to him. He opened his mouth and produced some fire, letting it flow out of his jaws as he walked around her body, creating a nest for her. Then, he sat down on his hind legs next to her, bowed his head, and closed his eyes.

****Opelucid, Vermont****

"This is crazy," Sam said.

Kaegan swung his baseball bat in practice as they were getting ready for their conquest. They were standing at the top of Church Street, a street in the center of Opelucid that was composed of the town's shopping center. There were stores- and even a mall- everywhere, and the entire street was a downhill slope. It was also crawling with zombies.

About a week had passed since they had escaped the shelter. They had tried to enter a safe state, but they were denied entry. The areas still under military control weren't letting anyone in or out. As it turned out, it didn't matter.

America had fallen. And now, they were stuck there as the war spread to the rest of the world.

"Looks like we came on a good day," Kaegan observed. "You ready?"

"No," Sam replied. "But I don't have a choice, do I?"

Kaegan grinned. "Nope. Gotta live a little, Sam."

Sam was nervous. But he forced the feeling away. "Let's go," he said. "Before I change my mind."

"Alright," Kaegan said. "On threeâ€| twoâ€| one!"

They charged down the street, yelling. "For Sparta!" Kaegan yelled. They reached the first group of zombies and started swinging.

Their bats collided with the zombies' skulls, and blood splattered everywhere. But the zombies went down. They didn't even slow down their pace.

The zombies along the rest of the street started to notice them, and began shambling in their direction. Sam braced himself; the real challenge was about to begin.

They reached another group of zombies and kept swinging. More blood splattered Sam's shirt, but he ignored it. He could get a new one later.

Everything was going fine. It actually looked like they might get out unscathed. Until it happened.

Sam tripped.

He was running so fast, he flew into the air and shot forward a few

feet before colliding with the ground. His leg landed awkwardly beneath him, and lit up with agony. He yelled in pain.

He felt hands on his back, and a voice asked in his ear, "Sam, are you okay?" Kaegan helped him to his feet. When he tried to walk, however, he stumbled.

"I think I sprained my leg," he said.

"Well that's just fucking great," said Kaegan. He lent Sam some support as he helped him walk forward. Around them, the zombies were getting close.

"We need to leave. Now," said Sam, grunting from the pain in his leg.

"No shit," said Kaegan. They went as fast as they could- which unfortunately wasn't much faster than the zombies. They were getting away from the ones behind them, but there was no exit for at least another thirty feet, and the zombies in front were boxing them off.

"We aren't going to make it," said Sam. "We're trapped."

Kaegan shook his head. "No," he said.

"I'm sorry. This is all my fault."

"No, it's not," said Kaegan. He appeared to be thinking. "And we aren't trapped. At least, you aren't."

"What are you talking-"

Before he could finish his sentence, Kaegan was running. He left Sam behind, and he collapsed to the pavement, struggling to bring himself to his feet. Kaegan waved his baseball in the air, screaming as loud as he could. "COME HERE YOU DIRTY MOTHERFUCKERS!" He yelled. "SUCK MY BALLS! COME ON! YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO!"

All the zombies on the street were now focusing on him. They seemed to forget about Sam. Taking his cue, Sam crawled into a shop to safety.

"I'M SORRY SAM!" Kaegan yelled. "IF I MAKE IT, MEET ME BACK AT YOUR HOUSE!"

Sam wanted desperately to follow his cousin and help him. But he knew that he couldn't. As Kaegan's voice, spewing a flood of profanity to lure the zombies away, grew fainter, the footsteps and moans of the zombies disappeared as well. Finally, Sam peered out the doorway and saw that the street was mostly empty.

He tried to stand up. It took a few minutes, but he was eventually able to limp onto the street. He made it back to the car that they had driven to get here, got in it, and drove away. He spent the majority of the day trying to find Kaegan- or his body. But he couldn't find a single trace of the boy.

He eventually went home, wondering if maybe Kaegan had managed to get there. But his house was empty.

His family was gone. His friends were gone. And now Kaegen was gone too. He was now completely alone. Sitting at his kitchen table, the sorrows of the past month finally descended on him in one crushing blow. He broke down and sobbed.

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Soon after that day, New Hampshire fell, and Sam made a decision. He was going to go home to Lyndrich.

When he first tried to get through the wall, he couldn't find any way through. Finally, he found an airport and stole a small plane, and after a week or so trying to figure out how to use it, he flew over the wall. He was a horrible pilot, and barely made it out alive.

When he had finished that, he made the long trek back to Lyndrich. Before, when they had a car, he would've been able to make it in three hours. But he didn't have a car, and probably wouldn't have used it if he did. He preferred walking.

A few days later, he arrived in Harristown, where he ran into his old friends; Joey and Brian. They had taken him back to their house, and he had spent the night. They offered to let him stay permanently, but he refused; he wanted to stay in his old house again.

The next day, he found it. Letting himself in the front door, he stepped in. It was weird, being home again. He hadn't set foot in this house in years. It was different than he remembered it. The people who had stayed in it changed it. Nostalgia hit him like a bomb inside his head, and he broke down crying for a bit.

That night, he fortified the house for a permanent stay, shooting any zombies that wandered into his yard. The next day, he went scavenging. He met some other survivors staying in town, but he didn't really know them, and preferred to keep to himself. The loss of his family and friends was too fresh, and he didn't want to lose anyone else.

He went to his old friend Matt's house that day as well. It was empty too. He decided to take some of his friend's things for safekeeping and decoration. He took most of his How to Train Your Dragon and Pokémon stuff, as well as his X-Box and some of his games and movies. He also buried Speedy, his turtle, for him, and left a note.

That night, he reflected upon all these events. The house was now completely fortified, and ready to be lived in. But it felt weird. After all the time away, it almost didn't feel like home anymore. And it felt lonely.

In order to chase away these feelings, he pulled out his 3DS to continue his shiny Mawile hunt. He was currently at 1455 eggs and counting.

He picked up five eggs from the daycare man, and set about the process of hatching them. About a minute later, the first one hatched.

He waited with anticipation as the egg cracked. Finally, it burst open, and the familiar sparks flashed across the screen. When they dispersed, he gasped.

The Mawile was shiny.

His heart fluttered. "Oh my God," he said, almost speechless. "I got it. I got it!"

As quickly as he could, he got out of the hatching screen and opened up the main menu to save the game. While it was saving, he had an epiphany.

Two good things had happened in the past two days. It wasn't just coincidence; it was a sign.

He _was_ _home_.

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Weeks had passed since Ashmore had escaped the lab. In total, it was about three months.

After he left 2-10's body, he flew across the country. He traveled only at night, to blend in with the sky. Every once in a while, he would come across a place he liked and settle down for a few days. But he would always keep moving.

An unseen force seemed to be leading him along, guiding his way. He had no idea which way he was going; only the feeling that he was _meant_ to go there. Eventually, after many days of traveling, he came to one of the most wonderful sights he had ever seen.

Water. A huge body of water, so vast that even at the highest altitude he could fly, its end couldn't be seen. A giant expanse of rolling, glittering blue. It looked almost like the edge of the world.

He stared at it with wonder. He had heard the scientists talking about things like this. They called it an "ocean."

He stayed along the shore of the ocean for a few days, flying over it and marveling at its beauty. One time, he caught sight of a group of strange creatures swimming towards the surface of the water. They were long and scaly, and the light glinted off of them.

After a long and irritating process, Ashmore managed to catch one. As he ate it, he felt as if he were in heaven. These creatures were by far the best thing he had ever tasted.

After that, he moved on. He changed direction this time; his instincts told him to travel along the shore. He traveled along the ocean for weeks, settling down here and there for a few days at a time. Finally, he made it to a giant wall.

As he flew over it, something clicked in his head. He felt as if he had reached a goal.

Had he reached New Hampshire?

He wasn't sure, but he did know that his instincts were telling him to change direction again. He followed them, and within a day he stopped to rest.

He found a house and squeezed into it, making a den for the day. But as he was going to sleep, he had the feeling that he would be staying here for a lot longer than a day.

His instincts, which had been guiding him from the start, were now telling him to stay. This was where he was supposed to be.

He didn't know it at the time, but he was staying in the town of Lyndrich, New Hampshire.

* * *

><p>So, what do you think?

****Next chapter will be on time (hopefully) since it's not that long. Then, we'll be back on track with Part Two!****

****In the meantime, let me know what you think!****

****Also, to the people posting suggestions as to which Pokemon should be on the team, while I do appreciate it... This was written two years ago. The team is well set in stone. Though I may be bringing more in in the future, so I will take those into consideration...****

****I'm not going to tell you what Pokemon they are just yet, but I will say that the team includes one from Gen. 1, one from Gen. 3, and four from Gen. 5. The team was created during one of me and Sam's Pokemon crazes where we were particularly excited about Gen 5 Pokemon, so that's why there's such an imbalance there.****

****Anyway, the team will be revealed in the next few chapters.****

****Until then, however, enjoy the story!****

29. Chapter Twenty-Eight: The Prison

****Alright guys, here's the next chapter!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD, Pokemon, or Night Furies and the various Pokemon mentioned in this chapter.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Twenty-Eight

****The Prison****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

"Elizabeth," Sam ordered. "Go get Lily, Reuniclus and Swampert. We need their help moving bodies."

Elizabeth nodded, got to her feet, and walked towards the woods.

"Wait," said Ashmore.

Elizabeth stopped and turned around. "What?" she asked.

"Are you okay?"

She nodded. "Yeah. Thanks." Then she walked off into the woods.

As if merely saying his name was enough to summon him, Swampert appeared from the woods at that moment. The huge creature limped towards them, blood dripping from one of his legs and a body carried with another.

Ashmore rushed over to him. "What happened?" he asked in concern.

"One of them actually put up a fight," Swampert replied. He placed the body on the ground and held up his paw. The purple skin (since he was a shiny Swampert, his skin was purple) was punctured by a large, bloody hole. Looking closely, Ashmore could see the glint of moonlight off of bullet.

"Ouch," he said. "You should get that fixed up."

"Yeah," Swampert replied. "But there's something else, too."

"What?"

"Here." He gestured with his head to the body on the ground. Ashmore bent over to investigate it, when he saw the face.

"What theâ€¦?" he asked. "That'sâ€¦"

"Yeah," Swampert replied.

Sam came over then. "Swampert? Are you okay?" he asked. "What happened to yourâ€¦ who's this?"

He knelt down and looked over the body. When he saw who it was, his expression immediately turned serious. "Swampert," he said. "Go home. I'll treat you once we finish up out here. And take them with you."

Swampert nodded, picked up the body, and walked off. "I'll see you guys later," he said.

Trent awoke in darkness.

He was lying on a cold, hard floor. The only thing that he could see was a light shining from a crack on the other side of the room. As his eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw that he was in the corner of some sort of garage.

His head ached. As he gripped it with one hand, he remembered what had happened.

"Shit," he said to himself, sitting up. "How does this happen three times in two weeks?"

He hoped to God that everyone else was okay. Joey, Brian, Ben, Anthony and Lucas had been taken; he knew that. But maybe there was still hope for the othersâ€¦

This is all my fault, he thought. _If I had just come here myself, things would've been so much better._

He started wondering what was going to happen to them. Obviously there would be consequences. But would they be killed? Or just kept imprisoned? Tortured? Whatever their fate was to be, Trent knew that he had to find a way out.

_Where am I, anyway? _He wondered. There was no way of knowing. He could be in Lyndrich still, or he could be miles away. He might not even be in New Hampshire.

Pushing those thoughts aside, he approached the door of the garage. Bending over, he slid his fingers through the crack and pulled up. The door wouldn't budge.

"God damn it!" he cursed, kicking the door. He tried again, but the door still wouldn't budge.

"Well this sucks," he stated.

Alena sat up in the dark, clutching her head.

"What happened?" she moaned. "Where am I?"

She shuddered as she remembered the fight they had been through. "Fuck," she said to herself. She stumbled to her feet and let her eyes adjusted to the dark.

The same thoughts that went through Trent's head also went through hers. As she looked around, she saw that she too, was in some kind of garage.

Ignoring the door- for she knew that it would be locked- she looked at the rest of the room's features. Something in a corner caught her eye, and she went over to investigate. It was a hole.

Looking through it, she could faintly see a room exactly like hers, and the silhouette of someone else, sitting in the middle of the room.

"Hello?" she called.

The person jerked upright. "Who's there?" they asked. From their voice, Alena could tell it was a boy.

"It's me," she replied. "Alena."

"Alena? You scared the shit out of me!" he got up and looked around. "Where are you?"

"There's a hole in the wall over here."

He looked her way and saw the hole. "Oh." He walked over and knelt down next to it. "It's Kody, by the way."

Alena remembered what had happened to Kody. "Are you okay?" she asked. "You were hurt pretty bad."

"Well, my head hurts," he replied. "But I'll live. What happened?"

"The Beast knocked you out," Alena explained. "And then it took out Andrew and Jean. Jean got a shot on it, but it didn't seem to do anything except piss it off. Me and Samantha got away and hid in a house, but it found us and set the house on fire. We were trapped, and it came to get us."

"Jeez." Kody was silent for a moment. "Do you know what it was?"

Alena nodded. "Yeah. At least, I think so." She reached into her pocket, only to see that the scale wasn't there. She must've dropped it in the house.

Then, she remembered something else.

"I think I know who the Black Man is, too. Or who one of his followers is, at least."

"Who?" Kody asked.

"When we went to Sam's house, there was something weird about it. Something justâ€¦ wasn't right, you know? It wasn't until much later that I realized what. The house was supposedly abandoned- only there was no dust. Not a single speck anywhere. Someone still lives there."

"Are you sayingâ€¦?"

"Yes." Alena took a deep breath. "Sam is with the Black Man. If he isn't the Black Man himself."

"My Godâ€¦" Kody trailed off. "That bastard. And all this timeâ€¦"

"And there's something else, too," Alena said. "To answer your question, yes, I know what the Beast is. While we were in his house, I found something on the floor. At the time, I thought it was some sort of stone. Later on, I realized what it really was. A scale. The Beast is a Night Fury."

Kody was speechless. "Whatâ€¦ Howâ€¦ Whenâ€¦" he struggled to find the words. Finally, he blurted out, "There's more than one?"

"Apparently. Matt said Shade was part of an experiment. It would make sense."

"We had this all wrong," he said. Suddenly, he started laughing.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"We were so _stupid_," he said. "The signs were right there, and we missed them."

Alena reflected upon this. And she realized that wasn't entirely true. The signs weren't always right in front of them; not to all of them, anyway. But they had been to Trent.

She realized then exactly how much Trent had been hiding from them. He had been warned- more than once, she was willing to bet- to stay away, but did he listen? No. Even worse, he had kept this information from them.

"Trent didn't miss them, though," said Alena.

"What do you mean?" asked Kody.

"I mean once we get out of here- if we get out of here- him and I are going to have a problem."

Evan was lying in the corner of the room, twiddling his thumbs out of sheer boredom. He was trying to remember what had happened, but was unsuccessful for the most part.

He remembered meeting up with Matt and the dragon- Shade? Was that his name? He wasn't sure. And the trek through the woods. But after that, the details were sketchy. And once they arrived at the police station- at least, it looked like the police station- he couldn't remember anything.

I'm going to kill them, he thought. They got me into this. I'm going to kick their asses.

Although he wasn't quite sure who he meant by 'they.'

"Evan," a voice called from the other corner. He looked over there. He knew that voice. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw a boy sitting in the other corner. As he looked more closely, he saw it was himself.

"What do you want, Evan?" he asked.

"Try the door," the other him said.

Evan stood up and walked over to the door. As he looked back, he saw that the other him was gone. He knelt down and slipped his fingers into the crack between the door and the floor and lifted up.

The lock on this door must've been broken, because although there was some resistance at first, with enough force he was able to open it.

When it was all the way open, he looked outside and surveyed his surroundings. It led outdoors, to a line of garages exactly like his. He knew this place. They were still in Lyndrich.

He looked the other way, and froze. At the end of the line of buildings was a massive yellow tarantula. It had navy blue markings on its body, tufts of purple hair coming off of its backside, and dark, purple eyes with pitch black pupils staring straight at him. A black bow was tied on the left side of her head.

Slowly, Evan backed up and lowered the door back into its place. He

then retreated into a corner and sat down, waiting.

Brian had been sitting in boredom for what felt like hours. As to how long it actually was, he couldn't say. But it had been a while.

He had dozed off a couple of times, and tried to find a way out another few times. But he had found nothing.

His mind wandered back to how he had gotten here. While he had been waiting for Joey to come back from his bathroom break, there had been a rustle in one of the bushes. He had drawn his gun and slowly walked towards the bush to investigate, when something had hit him in the back of the head. The next thing he remembered was waking up in this room.

He was just started to doze off again when he heard something. Noises from the other side of the door.

He stood up and walked over to the door, pressing his ear against it. But he couldn't make out what the noises were. Suddenly, there was a scratching sound from inside the door, and then a clink. Someone had unlocked it.

As the door opened, he took a step back, preparing himself for whatever was going to happen. But nothing he could have done could have prepared him from what he saw.

There was a dragon. A Night Fury. But it wasn't Shade; it was bigger, and there was no scar on its wing. Instead of green, its eyes were blue. Next to it was a girl with white hair.

Samantha.

"Samantha?" Brian said in shock. He fell to his knees. "What's going on?"

"Hello Brian," she said, grinning.

He looked from her to the dragon, and realized something: she wasn't a prisoner.

"Y-you're with him?" he asked.

She said nothing. She only smiled.

* * *

><p>I know that was a bit short, and didn't answer the last chapter's cliffhanger at all, but just wait until next Sunday. Everything will be revealed in time.

In the meantime, let me know what you think!

30. Chapter Twenty-Nine: Two Pasts: Part 2

**So sorry for the delay, here's the next chapter. This one gets a little... weird. So try and keep your suspension of disbelief. If you can't, well, the science part of it is only a huge focus in this

chapter, so... Yeah.**

Anyway, I hope you enjoy it!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD, Night Furies, Pokemon or any of the characters mentioned within, or Portal.

* * *

><p>Chapter Twenty-Nine:

Two Pasts: Part Two

Lyndrich, New Hampshire

Sometime in June

Sam was in the woods, gun in hand, stalking his prey. It was midnight.

The deer he was stalking was stopping to feed on some leaves. This was his chance. He raised his pistol, pulled back the hammer, and aimed.

Suddenly, there was a rustling in the undergrowth on the other side of the deer. Both him and the deer stopped and stared, wondering what it was.

At that moment, something massive leapt from its hiding place. Sam immediately took cover, pressing himself into the ground in order not to be seen. He heard a ferocious growl, and the sound of the deer's dying squeal. He heard its body fall limply to the ground, and the sound of it being dragged away.

Curiosity got the better of him, and he looked up to see if he could take a peek. But all he saw was a large, black shape disappearing into the trees.

Hesitantly, he stood up, heart pounding. "What the hell was that?" he breathed to himself.

He wasn't really hungry after that. He went home and barred all of his doors and windows for the night.

July 10**th****, 2014**

After that incident, he had a hard time bringing himself to go hunting at night again. If that _thing_ came back, and found _him_ _instead of a deer, wellâ€| he didn't want to think about it.

But after a few days, his fear evolved into curiosity. He started going hunting again, hoping to run into the creature, if only just to see what it was. For a week, he saw no sign of it, and was beginning to think it had moved on.

But then, one night, as he was looking for something to hunt, he found a footprint. A very large one. And it was fresh.

Over the next couple weeks, he saw more and more signs of the creature. His curiosity wouldn't let him ignore it, and since a gang

of violent people had taken over Gunnerville, his link to Brian and Joey had been severed. He had nothing better to do. He began to determine its hunting grounds. Twice he saw it kill, although neither time could he tell exactly what it was.

Until one night.

He was heading towards a section of undergrowth that was particularly big- big enough for anything to hide in. As he was walking towards it, something made him stop in his tracks.

A deep growl emanated from the undergrowth. Sam froze in place and dropped his flashlight, not daring to move a muscle. There was no prey around this time; only him.

The growling came again, and Sam realized that holding his gun out wouldn't help his case. He moved to put it in his pocket, but the sudden movement made the creature nervous. It growled again, more threateningly this time.

Slowly, Sam moved the gun into his pocket, and then raised his hands above his head. He could feel the creature's eyes on him; hear its breath as it took in his scent. He knew it was trying to decide whether or not he was a threat.

There was nothing he could do now. If it saw him as one, he would most likely die. He would just have to wait and see.

Ashmore stared at the young human, trying to make up his mind.

He knew this human had been stalking him. As to why, he did not know. But the human seemed to have his territory figured out, and was getting dangerously close to his current home.

At first, he had seen the human as a mild threat, but not one he had to go out of his way to deal with. But he started to change his mind when the human began to observe his hunting.

Many humans he had come across immediately attacked. But not this one. This one seemed fascinated by him, more keen on watching him than attacking.

The more he thought about it, the more Ashmore was convinced that maybe this human wasn't a threat at all. And part of him deep down inside almost wanted to meet him, and try to understand why he was doing what he was doing. But his brain argued against it. An entire life's worth of bad experiences with humans went against the very notion that they could be friendly. How could this one be any different?

Still, he was getting to the point where he could no longer ignore his gut. So he devised a plan.

He found the human one night, and silently followed him, determining where he was going. When he was able to figure out the path he was taking, he flew ahead and landed in a patch of undergrowth, waiting for him. When the human arrived, he started growling, announcing his presence, and trying to see what the human would do.

When the human started to move his gun, Ashmore at first thought he

was aiming it. He was very jittery around humans, especially armed ones. But then he realized that he was just putting it away.

He sniffed the air, taking in the human's scent, and observing his actions. He just stood there, hands in the air, submitting to the dragon's will.

After a minute of this, Ashmore finally decided that his gut was right. This human meant him no harm after all. He was simply curious.

With that, he backed up through the undergrowth, left the scene, and, when he determined he was far enough from the human, flew away.

When he got to the house he had made his home in, he started thinking. The gut feeling that had led him to stay here was acting up again, telling him to further investigate this human. He still had his doubts, but he eventually came to a decision.

He wouldn't go out of his way to confront the human. But the next time they met, he would finally show himself.

The next night, Sam was even more eager to look for the creature. When it left, he remained as he was for a minute, just in case. When he knew it was definitely gone, he left.

Something happened between them during that meeting. He felt as if he and the creature were now connected in some way, and that they were destined to meet up again. And so, on the night of July 11th, his 18th birthday, he went out.

For a few hours, he wandered through the woods. Nothing happened. It wasn't until he was close to giving up that something did.

He entered a small clearing and decided to take a rest. As he was sitting down, he heard a rustle in the trees.

He was on his feet immediately, surveying the area. His gaze came to a halt on the patch of undergrowth the noise had come from.

"Hello?" he called, cautiously walking towards it. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He took two more steps. On the third one, there was another, bigger rustling behind him. He had just enough time to register it before something struck his back.

He fell to the ground, and felt a weight holding him there. His flashlight rolled away to the other side of the clearing. Something hit the ground to his left, and he turned his head to see.

It was a large black leg. He could just make it out enough to see that it was scaled, and ended in a set of razor-sharp claws.

"Oh my God," he whispered. Whether it was an expression of fear or wonder, he wasn't sure.

He felt the creature's hot breath on the back of his neck as it sniffed him. He tried to tell himself it was just making sure he wasn't a threat.

Finally, it must have decided he wasn't. The weight lifted off of him, and the shadow of the creature disappeared. But it didn't leave.

Sam started crawling towards his flashlight. He did it slowly and cautiously at first, not wanting to startle the creature. But it did nothing except watch.

He sped up and crawled to his flashlight. When he reached it, he picked it up and rolled over, sat up, and pointed it at the creature.

The beam of the flashlight illuminated the visitor, which he saw fully for the first time. He froze in shock as he saw what it was: a dragon.

And not just any dragon, either. It had scales the color of the night sky, a sleek, aerodynamic panther-like body, and the signature ear flaps. The only difference was the eyes; instead of emerald green, they were an icy blue. But that didn't change the fact that it was a Night Fury.

Of all the things he had dreamed about, this was one he thought would never actually happen. But here it was, happening. He had come face to face with a real live Night Fury.

"Oh my God!" he said. The shock was too much for him to handle. He fainted.

Despite having gotten used to this sort of thing- the two most common human reactions to him were fainting and violence- Ashmore was still somewhat surprised when the human fell unconscious. He had thought that the boy had known what he was getting into.

Apparently not.

Part of him wanted to leave. But something was telling him it would be a bad idea. He would be leaving the human at the mercy of any predator that happened to come along. So he made a decision. He approached the human, scooped him up with his foreleg and gripped him with his claws, and flew off towards his house.

Sam awoke on an unfamiliar couch.

He jerked upright and looked around at his surroundings. He was in a house he had never been in before. It looked abandoned for the most part, but he had a hunch it wasn't.

He remembered what had happened. At first, he wanted to dismiss it as a dream, but the fact that he had woken up in a completely strange environment suggested not.

He caught sight of something next to him. The dragon. It was curled up on the floor, looking at him. Its expression wasn't one of fear or contempt, but of mere curiosity.

The first thing he felt was joy. Pure, unadulterated joy. Dragons were one of his favorite things in the world, if not his single favorite thing. And he especially loved Night Furies; How to Train

Your Dragon_ was and would always be his favorite movie. To come face to face with a real one made him happy beyond words.

The second thing he felt was confusion. _Is this its home? _ He wondered. _If it is, why did it take me here? And how does it even exist in the first place?_

He got up off the couch and stood above it. The dragon stood up after him and sat on its hind legs, wings pressed to its side.

"My God," Sam whispered. "I don't believe thisâ€¦ This is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me."

Something caught his eye around its neck. A red collar with writing on it. Frowning, Sam reached forward to take it.

The dragon growled in distrust. Sam brought his hand back and said, "Relax. I just want to see what this says."

It calmed down, and allowed him to touch it. He curled his fingers around the red band, brushing the smooth scales beneath. His heart beat faster at the touch.

"Is it okay if I take it off?" he asked.

Then, to his surprise, the dragon nodded.

Sam frowned again. "Can you understand me?"

The dragon nodded again.

Sam laughed. "Okay that is freaking awesome."

He unclipped the collar and read the black writing on it. _"Ashmore," _it read.

"Ashmore," he said. "Is that your name?"

The dragon's ears pricked up, and it nodded.

"That's a pretty cool name," he said. Ashmore's lips pulled back in an attempt to smile.

Sam couldn't help but chuckle. "Okay, before this goes any further, there's something I need to know. Are you a boy or a girl?"

He was waiting for Ashmore to respond, when he remembered that he couldn't speak. At least, not to him. "Okay," he said. "Nod if you're a boy."

Ashmore nodded.

Sam grinned. "Makes sense," he said. "Ashmore would be a horrible name for a girl, dragon or not."

Ashmore warbled in agreement.

Sam sat down, unsure of what to say next. Obviously, Ashmore didn't mean him any harm. At least, he was pretty sure of that. But what exactly did he want?

"Is this your place?" he asked.

Ashmore nodded.

Sam chuckled and looked around. "Why'd you bring me here?"

The dragon shrugged.

They spent the next few hours like that. Sam talked to Ashmore, reveling in the excitement of talking with a real dragon. When it was getting late, he reluctantly realized it was time for him to go. He got up and announced, "Well, I should be going. It was a great time, though." He started heading for the door, then stopped and turned to look at Ashmore.

"This is a dream come true for me," he said. "Do you think I could come back tomorrow?"

Ashmore thought about it for a moment. Normally he hated interacting with humans. But this one was different; he couldn't deny that now. He liked this one. A lot.

He nodded.

Sam grinned, and pumped his fist in the air. "I'll see you tomorrow, then."

As he walked out, Ashmore knew one thing for sure. He wasn't sure how he knew, just that he did. This was the start of something great.

****One month later****

Over the next month, Sam continued to visit Ashmore. The two grew closer and closer to each other, eventually becoming best friends. After a few weeks, Ashmore was even letting Sam fly on his back.

Sam was having the time of his life, especially when they were flying. Not only was it the most fun he'd ever had, but it seemed to create a much deeper bond between the two.

But not all was good during that time. After a month, the gang that had taken over Gunnerville was done sealing off the town, and was moving into the surrounding area. They were conducting raids on certain parts of Lyndrich, stealing things and kidnapping survivors.

For Sam and Ashmore, this was the final push. They had been considering this for a while; they were best friends now, and living alone was dangerous. But now, it was even more crucial to watch each others' back.

They decided that Ashmore was going to move in with Sam.

"Alright," said Sam as they walked through his front door. "Welcome to your new home."

Ashmore surveyed the house and decided that he liked it. It was much more cozy than the abandoned, broken down house he had been living

in, and to make things better, he would no longer be alone.

Sam shut the door behind them and gave Ashmore a tour around the house. When they were done, he went to go make some dinner.

"You like fish?" he asked. "I went fishing the other day and caught some." He laughed.

Before he did that, he hooked up the generator outside and used it to cook the food. Then, when he was done, he decided he wanted to show Ashmore something.

"Hey, want to watch a movie?" he asked.

Ashmore looked at him in confusion. He didn't know what a movie was.

Sam explained it to him. "There's one in particular I want to show you called How to Train Your Dragon. I think you'll get a kick out of it."

Ashmore nodded. Why not? He thought.

Sam set up the movie, and they watched it as they ate. At first, Ashmore didn't seem that interested, but once Toothless came in, his attention was gained. He watched the screen in fascination.

So this is where he knows Night Furies from, Ashmore thought. This is pretty cool.

After the movie was over, they "talked" about it for a while. Ashmore loved it. He liked the concept of movies in general now. It had taken him a little bit to get into it, but once he was able to relate to it he was hooked.

After that, they went to bed. Ashmore followed Sam to his bedroom and curled up on the floor next to him. Both of them went to sleep feeling happier than they had felt in months.

Over the next few weeks, their friendship only strengthened. They taught each other things; Ashmore taught Sam what it was like to be a dragon rider. And Sam taught Ashmore how to read, and eventually, write crudely with his claws. Their friendship even got to the point where Ashmore trusted Sam enough to tell him about the lab.

Despite all that was going on in the surrounding towns, they were happy, and they thought that it couldn't get any better.

But it did.

****Late August****

They first heard of Aperture towards the end of August.

One day, while they were out scavenging, they split up. Sam was rummaging through an abandoned house, while Ashmore was hunting in the woods behind it. Sam had found a few non-perishable goods, and was waiting in the street for Ashmore to return when he saw her.

A woman was walking down the street towards him. She was Latina, with

long, black hair and fair, tan skin. She was thin, but everyone was these days.

"Hey," she said when she was close enough. Sam noticed she was pointing her gun at him, and looked at it suspiciously.

"Oh, sorry," she said. She lowered her gun. "I thought you were a zombie at first."

"It's alright," Sam replied.

They talked for a moment before going their separate ways. Seeing another survivor was becoming increasingly rare, and it was nice to see one that was still alive. They had no interest in sticking around each other, however.

The last thing they said to each other was this:

"Alright, I should probably get going," the woman said.

"Okay, good luck out there," Sam replied.

"Oh, but one last thing before I go," she said. "Do you live around here?"

Sam nodded. "Yeah. Why?"

"Do you know anything about what's going on in Manchester?"

Sam frowned, his curiosity aroused. "No," he replied. "What's going on?"

"Oh, well, I found a radio while I was there, and thought that maybe I should flip through the stations and see if there were any broadcasts, you know, from any survivors in the area. I didn't find any, but I did find something really weird. There was a strange signal being sent out. I don't know where it was coming from, but it seemed like it was close. There was a voice, but I couldn't tell what it was saying. There was too much static."

"That's weird," said Sam.

"Yeah," she laughed. "Well, good luck."

As soon as Ashmore got back, Sam told him what he had learned.

Ashmore was curious about it as well, but not nearly as much as Sam was. The human wanted to investigate and see what the signal was. Strange happenings intrigued him, especially because the last time he had investigated them, it had resulted in the two of them meeting each other.

Eventually, Ashmore agreed to go, and the next day, they were off.

After an hour or two of flying, they reached Manchester. They set down in the middle of the city and began looking for a radio.

The place was a wreck. There were bodies and zombies all over the

streets, and they had to be careful. Cars were broken down, buildings had collapsed, and signs of chaos were everywhere.

Eventually, they found a portable radio in an old electronics store. Sam was able to set it up on the store counter, and began flipping through the stations. After a few minutes, he found it.

The transmission was almost completely blocked out with static. But he could just faintly hear a woman's voice underneath it.

"Where the hell is that coming from?" he wondered aloud. He picked up the radio and went outside. First, he walked all the way up the street. The transmission only grew weaker.

"Well, there's our answer," he said. "Come on, Ashmore. Let's go."

They flew in the opposite direction until the transmission finally came through clearly. Now that he could hear it, Sam listened to what it was saying- which, turned out to be nothing but a random series of numbers. But the voice sounded familiar. It almost sounded like that of GLaDOS from the Portal video games. In other words, it sounded like an artificial intelligence.

As for what it was saying, he couldn't tell. It wasn't speaking in any language he understood.

"What about you?" he asked Ashmore. "Can you understand it?"

Ashmore shook his head.

Sam looked down at the ground below. They were above a forest near the city. He scanned the trees, searching for something that could be the source of the signal. He eventually saw something.

"Ashmore, can you land there?" he asked.

Ashmore nodded and banked, slowly landing next to an abandoned shack. The transmission was stronger than ever.

"Alright, let's go."

Gun raised, Sam tried the door of the shack to find that it was unlocked. Slowly, he eased it open, waiting for something to happen.

Nothing did. When it was all the way open, he saw that the shack was completely deserted.

The two of them walked in and looked around. "That's weird," Sam commented. "I could've sworn the signal was coming from here."

He looked at Ashmore, who was sniffing the floorboards. The dragon seemed to be interested in something. He walked forward, continuously sniffing the floor, until he reached the middle.

He stopped there, giving the floor a few more sniffs. Then, he looked up at Sam.

It's here, _he seemed to say.

Sam walked over and tested the floorboards with his feet. They feltâ€¦ different, somehow. He stomped on them, and heard a resonating echo underneath them.

"Help me pull these up," he said. He slipped his hands into a crack between two floorboards and yanked up. The nails holding it down were old and damaged, and slipped out relatively easily. With enough effort, he was able to pull the floorboard up.

After he put it off to the side, he crouched down to look at what lay beneath. He found himself looking down a massive hole. The light from the cabin illuminated it just enough for him to see a set of stairs.

"Help me with these," Sam requested. He started to pull up another floorboard, and next to him, Ashmore did the same.

A few minutes later, the stairs were completely uncovered. The tunnel was just big enough for Ashmore to fit into it.

The two of them looked at each other. "Well," said Sam. "Wanna check it out?"

Ashmore nodded.

"Okay." Just as Sam was about to step down, however, something caught his eye.

From underneath one of the floorboards still in place around the tunnel, something was just barely sticking out. Upon closer inspection, Sam saw that it was a folded piece of paper.

Sliding it out from its hiding place, he unfolded it and read the message written.

183248

"Huh," he said. "I wonder what this is for."

Shaking his head, he folded the paper and put it in his pocket. He could worry about that later. Right now, he had other things on his mind.

He and Ashmore descended into the tunnel. It was pitch black; Ashmore's large body was blocking off all light. Sam reached into his pocket, pulled out his flashlight, and turned it on.

The stairs seemed to last forever. For minutes, they descended, wondering if they would ever end. Finally, the flashlight beam illuminated a door. It was made of steel, and next to it was a glowing panel with numbers on it.

"Looks like there's a code," he observed. "But what would it beâ€¦?"

And then he remembered the paper. He reached into his pocket and pulled it out, shining the flashlight on it. He punched the numbers into the panel and waited.

A green LED light appeared, and the door slid open. Beyond it was a sleek, well-lit metal hallway.

Behind him, he could sense Ashmore getting fidgety. "What's wrong?" he asked, although he thought he knew.

Ashmore warbled in response. "Does this remind you of the lab?" Sam asked. The dragon nodded.

They proceeded down the hallway anyway, eventually coming across another staircase. "Jeez, how far down does this go?" Sam wondered aloud. And then he saw the door.

It was built with the same material as the first one, except it was slicker, and curved backwards. On it, blue letters spelled out _Welcome to Aperture Laboratories_.

"No fricking way," he breathed. "Oh, I _knew_ coming here was a good idea."

He noticed a button on the wall next to the door and pressed it. The door slid open to reveal an elevator just big enough for them to fit.

"You ready?" he asked.

Ashmore nodded reluctantly.

They stepped into the elevator and waited as the doors closed. As it descended, Sam was in a state of disbelief.

First I meet a Night Fury, he thought. _Then I find Aperture? What the hell is this, some really screwed up fanfiction?_

The elevator reached the bottom of its descent and the door swung open to reveal a lobby-like room, with three hallways branching off of it.

"This is cool," Sam said in wonder. He and Ashmore stepped out of the elevator and looked around. "Which way should we go?" he asked.

Ashmore shrugged.

"Okay then— let's go— right."

They walked down the right hallway, which led almost immediately to a closed door marked _Storage_.

Sam opened the door and the two of them stepped inside. Behind it was a dark room that seemed a lot less well-kept than the rest of the facility. What it lacked in its cleanliness, however, it more than made up for in size. The room was massive; about the size of a grocery store, and was filled with shelves. On the shelves were pieces of unused scientific equipment, computers, etc. Some of them Sam could identify, but he didn't have the slightest idea as to what some of the others were.

After a while of walking around, Sam decided that there wouldn't really be anything of use to them in this room. "Hey, do you want to

look around the rest of the labs?" he asked Ashmore.

Ashmore nodded.

"Okay, let's go then."

As soon as he started heading back, he heard a thump from where they had entered from.

_What the hell? _He thought. _That sounded likeâ€|_

"The door," he said, and started running. Behind him, Ashmore warbled in confusion, and he turned and said, "Someone shut the door!"

The two of them ran towards the front of the room, the mood between them growing tense. When they reached it, they found that nobody was there. Not anymore, at least. _Someone_ had shut the door.

"They might still be in here," Sam said. "We should leave." He tried to unlock the door, but it wouldn't budge.

_"__I'm afraid I can't let you do that," _a voice said.

Sam froze. He would know that voice anywhere.

"Oh Godâ€| Damn it, I should've seen this coming."

_"__You have intruded on my property, and you must pay the price."_

"So you're realâ€| GLaDOS," said Sam.

_"__So you've heard of me? I can honestly say I didn't see that coming. But that's beside the point. If you've heard of me, I'm sure you know what to expect, right?"_

"You're going to test us, aren't you?" asked Sam. Next to him, he heard Ashmore start growling.

_"__That's correct." _As she spoke, a hissing noise began filling the room. _"The room is now being filled with a special toxin that will cause you to fall unconscious. There is no escape, and once the toxin takes effect, you'll be mine."_

"No!" Sam yelled. "Please!"

_"__It's too late. Foolish human."_

"We'll do anything you want, just let us go!"

Suddenly, the hissing stopped. The sound was replaced by GLaDOS's laughter.

_"__I was waiting for you to say that. It seems it's your lucky day. I just got some new test subjects, so I won't be needing any more for a little while. Of course, I could still just kill you, but that would be a bad idea on my part. Because I have needs, and I think I know how you can satisfy them."_

"What do you mean?" asked Sam.

"Here's my proposal. I will let you go- and even allow you to return and use any Aperture equipment and facilities you like- if you find me more test subjects."

Sam gulped. That didn't sound good. "How exactly are we supposed to do that?" he asked.

"Easy. You lure people here. I don't care how, just do it. And whenever someone arrives, whether it's by your help or not, you must do whatever you can to keep them here until I can use the toxin."

It was a tempting offer. But Sam knew what happened to GLaDOS's test subjects. They died. He couldn't do that to someone

Unlessâ€¦|

What if he tricked her? Would that be possible? He could pretend to try to lure people in, but say that nobody was around, or that nobody was falling for it. It seemed risky, but it was the only way. He could just never come back, but he didn't want to do that. Since they had entered the facility, an idea had formed in his head, and had been growingâ€¦|

He came to a decision.

"I'll do it," he said.

Ashmore looked at him in surprise. Sam looked back and tried to send him an unspoken message as to what he was trying to do.

_"A wise decision," GLaDOS remarked. _"Very well. You may leave. I am, of course, taking the risk of you running away, but I think we both know you won't do that. I've been watching you. Ever since you arrived, I've been studying your behavior, your actions, etc. It isn't much to go by, but I know one thing: you're curious and fascinated. Such human emotions. They always get you into tight spots._

"Anyway, you'll be back, because you haven't finished in here."

Damn, she's good, Sam thought. He clenched his fists.

_"But let me make one thing clear," _she continued. _"If I catch you trying to trick me, or if you run and ever come back I _will kill you."_

****Many days later****

After they had made the deal with GLaDOS, she had allowed them to look around Aperture. While she would only let them on the top floor (she didn't want them to interfere with testing), they found everything they could have hoped for and more.

Sam found himself shocked at how selfish the government had been. They had produced technology so great that they could've changed the world for the better, and yet they kept it locked away underground. The kind of technology was far ahead of what he thought of as "their

time." To think that the government had hidden it all away made him glad it wasn't there anymore.

Eventually, he found what he had been looking for: the genetic engineering labs. The idea that had been seeded into his brain became overwhelmingly powerful now.

For days at a time (much to Ashmore's dismay, although after Sam told him his plan he decided to go along with it; he wanted to see what would happen), they spent their time researching genetic engineering in the lab. He barely understood what they were talking about, but the machines they had produced had made it far easier than ever before.

Once he had some idea of what he was doing, they set about trying to accomplish their goal. For the next few days, they searched for different animal specimens, extracting DNA from them. He even took some of Ashmore's DNA. When all of the specimens were taken, he started to mix them.

The machines were so advanced that he could completely control the genes. He made some dominant, and others recessive; he even abolished some completely. When the organism was finally completely designed, and the zygote developed, he extracted the small piece of life from the device.

He had to be quick about this part. If it didn't get into the other machine quickly, it would die. He hurried to the machine and inserted the cell as fast as he could. Then, he turned it on and waited.

There was a special feature to this machine. The scientists had figured out how to manipulate the cells in order to speed up life. Sam wasn't sure if it was the best thing to do, but he had to find out if his experiment had worked. So, that was what he did.

As he sat there and watched the cell grow, he held his breath in anticipation. The organism he had created was now big enough to be seen with the human eye. As the speck grew into something he could see, the full truth of what he was doing hit him.

He was creating a Swampert. A real shiny Swampert.

Excitement coursed through his veins. If this worked, it would be the greatest thing he had ever done. Not just because he would be creating one of his favorite non-existent creatures, but because it would open up the possibility of creating more.

The organism was now a fetus. It looked nothing like a Swampert, but as he watched it began to look more and more like a Mudkip; a creature that would eventually grow into a Swampert. And best of all, it was purple. A shiny Mudkip.

Sam felt a tear of joy run down his face. It was beautiful. He knew right then that as long as the Mudkip survived, he would pull this off. He turned to look at Ashmore.

"It's beautiful," he said.

Ashmore nodded in agreement.

Finally, the aging process was complete. The Mudkip was fully grown. He (for Sam had made sure it would be a male) was purple all over, except for his orange cheeks and white underbelly. There was a single fin on the top of his head, and another that acted as a tail.

Finally, it was done. The moment of truth was here. Sam shut down the machine, opened it up and took the Mudkip out.

He checked its pulse. It was alive.

"Oh my God," said Sam, tears of joy running down his cheeks. "This is amazing."

The Mudkip was asleep for now. But it would wake up later and need nourishment. For now, Sam just cradled it in his arm like it was his child. In a way, when he thought about it, it was.

Ashmore gave the little creature a few sniffs, and then gave it an affectionate lick. Sam looked at him and smiled.

"We did it," he said. "We created a Pok mon."

****Sometime in late October****

Something in the way he had been created made the Mudkip grow at an alarmingly fast rate. By the end of a month, he was no longer a Mudkip and instead a fully grown Swampert. He had become a close friend of both Ashmore and Sam. Ashmore was able to communicate with him, and in turn passed onto him most of his knowledge. Swampert was just as intelligent as either of them.

Over the past month, Sam repeated his experiments. By the time he was done, he would have genetically engineered seven different Pok mon, although only six had survived the process. The seventh had been born dead.

What was even better was that somehow, something in their genes allowed them to have the same powers, more or less, than they had in the games.

By late September, his post-Z-Day life had reached a peak. He had seven amazing friends- Ashmore, Swampert, Lily, Elizabeth, Jack, Gengar and Reuniclus- and he was happy.

But it wouldn't last.

In Gunnerville, the gang was starting to get more power-hungry. They began raiding Lyndrich much more furiously, making their goal clear; to take control of the town. Many survivors in the area fled. Those that stayed were captured.

At first Sam and his gang decided to stay out of it; lay low and hope it would blow over. But over time, it became clear that it wouldn't happen.

Things finally came to a boiling point for them when they were out scavenging one day. They were in the center of town, looking through houses, when the soldiers came in. They only just barely made it out

without being seen.

That day seared itself in Sam's memory, for he had seen them find a survivor. They held him down, and demanded that he return with them. When he refused, they shot him dead and left his body in the middle of the street.

After they left, he tried to make a dash to get out of the area. But one of them found him. He was a big man, who used katanas as a weapon. When he found Sam, he tried to knock him out and bring him back. But before he could do that, Ashmore came up from behind and killed him.

They left his body there for the zombies to eat. But Sam decided to take his katanas with him.

He decided they had to do something. And, with the help of his friends, he devised a plan.

He needed to create another identity for himself. One that make himself known to the people of Gunnerville, and hold them at bay. And the more he thought about it, the more he liked the plan.

He broke into the police station the next day to collect as much Kevlar as he could. With it, he fashioned himself a uniform; a uniform that would be his new image; the image that would in time become known as the Man in Black. He decided to use the katanas he had picked up as weapons.

For the next few days, he spent all his time practicing. He picked up on the fighting style quickly, but he was far from good enough to use them in a real fight. He needed to improvise.

And he thought of a way of doing that as well. Within a week from that moment, he was ready. Not a moment too soon, either. That very day, the raiders returned.

Sam and Ashmore saw them while they were out on a flight. Quickly, before they could be seen, they returned to the house, where Sam changed into his outfit. Then, he and Reuniclus got into their car and drove to the scene of the fight.

They parked around the corner from the action. Sam turned to Reuniclus and explained his plan. Reuniclus was a psychic type, so she could help guide his hand. The Pokémon liked the plan. So, they got out of the car and made their way through the woods, towards the gunshots.

When they reached the raid, they hid in the undergrowth, waiting for their moment. "Remember," Sam whispered. "Stay here."

Reuniclus nodded.

Luckily, there were no survivors left in this part of town. The gunshots were caused by the raiders shooting zombies. Sam waited until they were all out in the open until he made his move.

When it was time, he suddenly froze up. He wasn't sure if he could do it.

Go ahead, Sam, he heard Reuniclus's voice in his head. _You can do it. It's now or never._

Sam nodded, and then stepped out into the open. "Hey, assholes!" he yelled.

Immediately, all of the raiders turned to look at him, and upon seeing him, they roared into laughter.

"This may be October," one of them said. "But this isn't Halloween. Now get lost, kid, and you just might live."

Sam shook his head. "I can't do that. You've been ruining this town for long enough. And now, you'll have to face the consequences."

The men cracked up with laughter. Then, the one that had spoken calmed down and said, "Well then. Guess we won't be seeing you much longer."

He raised his gun and shot. His aim was true, and it would've killed him, if Reuniclus hadn't interfered. At that moment, Sam felt her psychic powers create a barrier around him, changing the course of the bullet so that it hit his armor. She also cushioned the blow significantly.

It smarted a little, but Sam stayed standing. "What the hell?" the man said aloud. Around him, all ten of the other men raised their guns and aimed.

Damn, Sam thought.

They all unloaded on him at once. Bullets flew at him from seemingly everywhere, but Reuniclus's barrier held strong. It still hurt; it felt like he was receiving multiple beatings at once. But he pushed the pain away, and focused only on his will to fight.

When they were all out of bullets, they just stared at him, dumbfounded.

"Nice try," said Sam. He reached behind his back and gripped his katanas. "Now it's my turn."

He whipped them out and ran forward. As he did so, he felt Reuniclus begin to control his limbs, giving him extra strength and dexterity. Before they could do anything, he slashed out at the first two, cutting their legs clean off. They fell to the ground, screaming. Before he could let himself think of what he had just done, he focused his attention on the remaining eight.

They were starting to reload. Before they could, he flipped his katanas around and bashed two of them in the face as hard as he could, knocking them out cold. Then he flipped them again and slashed out at two more.

Six were down. Four left.

The four had finished reloading, and started shooting again. With Reuniclus's help, he was able to dodge a lot of the bullets, and reach two of them.

He brought his fists up into the undersides of their guns, pushing them into their faces. They both went down. Another came rushing at him, and he ducked, causing the man to trip over him. Sam stood up and immediately swung his katana at the last one, cutting off his leg.

Then, it was over. He stood among the blood and bodies, victorious. And as he went around making sure they were all unconscious and pondered what he was going to do with those who had survived, he realized something.

Deep down, a piece of him had changed. That piece was no longer a part of the boy known as Sam. It was someone else.

And thus, the Man in Black was born.

* * *

><p>So yeah, I hope you liked that. Sam's backstory is finished now, and we can get back to the present. Also, you now know most of the team.

So, what did you think?

31. Chapter Thirty: Old Friends

Alright guys, I'm actually on time this time! And not late at night either!

So, here's chapter thirty. Now, we're finally back on track with the plot! I hope you like it!

Disclaimer: I do not own HTTYD, Pokemon or Portal, or any of the subsequent characters mentioned herein.

* * *

><p>Chapter Thirty

Old Friends

Lyndrich, New Hampshire

Samantha awoke in the last place she thought she'd be: in the comfort of a warm bed.

Her head ached horribly, and it took a while for her to process everything that was going on. The memories came first. Then, the surprise.

She opened her eyes and found herself in an unfamiliar room, with the telltale roar of a generator in the background. Sunlight spilled in from the window right next to her bed. Then she realized exactly where she was: Sam's bedroom.

"Whatâ€¦?" she muttered. "This house was empty..."

She heard a warbling sound from across the room, and looked towards it. On the floor was a Night Fury, looking at her. At first, she

thought it was Shade, but then she saw that it was too big, and its eyes were blue.

Her first response was panic. _It's the Beast,_ she thought. _The Beast is a Night Fury!_

But then she realized it didn't look threatening at all. It looked sympathetic, if anything.

Then she noticed the other Night Fury. It was on the floor in between them, unconscious. She recognized him as Shade.

"Shade!" she whispered. "What happened?"

He was covered in cuts, and looked like he'd been through a lot. Worry instantly spread through her heart as she saw how hurt he had been.

She also realized that the other Night Fury was caring for him. She looked at it, and asked, "Will he be okay?"

The dragon nodded.

"Thank God." She swung her legs over the side of the bed and slipped off, sitting next to Shade and rubbing his head.

The other dragon grunted to get her attention. She looked up and saw him gesturing with his wing towards the stairs.

"You want me to go down there?" she asked.

The dragon nodded again.

Samantha stood up and walked towards the stairs. Right before she left, she turned and said to the dragon, "Thanks for taking care of him."

She went down the stairs to the first floor. She stepped into the kitchen and came face to face with a boy sitting at the table. He was about her age, with curly, longish brown hair and glasses. He was tall and skinny. She also noticed that he was fiddling with her sound gun.

"Great," he said. "You're up. Sit down." He gestured to the seat in front of him.

Samantha pulled the chair out and took a seat. "Who are you?" she asked.

"This is a really cool device," he said. "I thought up of something like it once, but it was purely imaginary. I never thought I would actually see one," he said, ignoring her question. He looked up at her, and asked, "Did you make this?"

Samantha just stared at him, ignoring the question.

He sighed. "I have a few different names," he said. He leaned forward, crossing his arms on the table in front of him. "You might know me as the Man in Black."

Fury was ignited within her, and she lunged forward, swinging at him. "You bastard!" she yelled.

The Man in Black dodged her fist, and she fell forward onto the table. "I'm sorry!" he said. "But I warned you. And I had a score to settle."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Aperture. You people pretty much _destroyed_ that place."

Samantha was silent for a moment. Then, she asked, "What do you want with me?"

"Good question," the Man in Black complimented. "Normally, I'd throw you in the prison with everyone else. But there's something different about you, somethingâ€¦ special."

"What do you mean, 'special?'" she asked. He had gained her full attention. He knew something about her, and she wanted to know what.

"Let me ask you something," the Man in Black said. "What is your name?"

"What makes you think I would tell you?" asked Samantha.

"Because I can tell how much you want to know what I'm talking about. But I can't tell you anything unless I know your name."

"Fine," Samantha gave in. "It's Samantha. Samantha White."

The Man in Black looked speechless. "So it is you," he said. "How is this possible?"

Samantha was very confused. "I'm sorry," she said. "But who are you?"

"My name is Sam," the Man in Black replied faintly.

Now it was Samantha's turn to be speechless. "What?" she asked. "You'reâ€¦ you're Sam?"

"Yeah," Sam replied. "You know me?"

"Of course I know you," she said. "I've been looking for you. We were all looking for you." She stood up, anger coursing through her. "How could you?" she seethed.

"How could I what?" asked Sam.

"How could you just attack all of your friends like that? They wanted to see you again; it was one of the reasons we were here! Well you know what? I'm sure they'd _love_ to know what a _bastard_ you've become!"

"What friends?" asked Sam. The expression on his face was grave.

"_Your_ friends. All your friends that lived around here Before. I met them all, and we were traveling together until _you ruined everything!"_

Once again, Sam was speechless. "Iâ€| had no idea," he said. "Oh my Godâ€|"

"Sure you didn't."

"No, you have to believe me! If I had knownâ€| this was all just a big misunderstanding!" He stood up, and started trembling a little bit. She could tell he was having an anxiety attack. "Please, you need to help me."

"Why the hell would I help you?" she yelled.

"Because I need your help getting your friends back," he replied.

Samantha was silent. She wanted to be mad at him, but for some reason, the feeling wouldn't stay. She somehow, deep inside, knew he was telling the truth, and that the guilt was overflowing out of him. "Okay," she finally said. "I'm listening."

Sam said nothing to her. Instead, he left the room the way Samantha had entered. "Ashmore!" he heard her call. "Come down here for a second!"

He came back into the kitchen, followed a few moments later by the Night Fury Samantha had met upstairs.

"Ashmore," he said. "I need you to take her to the prison. I'd do it myself but I have to tend to our wounded. Tell Lily I said to let the prisoners out and bring them here."

Lilyâ€| she thought. _That nameâ€|_

"There's been a misunderstanding," he continued. Ashmore looked unsure, and he said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of him."

"Take care of who?" asked Samantha.

Sam looked at her. "2-9," he said.

"Who the hell is 2-9?"

He frowned. "You must not know him by that name then. The Night Fury upstairs."

"Who, Shade?" she asked.

"So that's what you call him. I'm surprised you don't know about the lab he came from. They called him 2-9 there."

"How do you know all this?"

"Ashmore here told me." Sam slung his arm around Ashmore's shoulders. "They were friends before all this. He really never told you?"

"I don't see why he would," asked Samantha. "I just met him a week

ago."

Sam frowned. "Really?" he asked. "So who's his friend in your group, if it isn't you? I could've sworn it would be you!"

"No, it's not. But I wish," she chuckled. "If you really want to know, it's Matt."

"Matt's with you?" he almost choked.

"Yeah. All but me, Shade, and three others knew you. And there's a lot of us."

"Then you have to hurry. Go get them, now!"

"Okay," said Samantha. "But when I get back, I want answers. Matt told me about your drawings. You drew pictures of me, and you didn't even know me. I want to know about that."

Sam nodded. "I'll tell you everything, I promise."

Ashmore flew Samantha to a bunch of outdoor self-storage garages near the center of Lyndrich. When they landed, Samantha slid off of his back. "Thanks, Ashmore," she said.

Ashmore nodded, and then walked towards one of the bins, waiting for her to follow.

Samantha did as she was told, and Ashmore stopped in front of it and sat down on his hind legs. He then looked down the row of bins and motioned to someone at the end. Samantha followed his gaze and stopped in wonder.

At the end of the line was a giant, yellow tarantula. As she looked closer, she saw that it was not only a tarantula, but a Galvantula. A real-life Pokémon. It started moving closer to them, and Samantha saw that it had a black bow on the left side of its head, just above its eye.

_That's Lily, _she thought, remembering what Matt and Sam had both said, and recognizing the beast.

Lily reached the two of them and started making strange, squeaking noises. Ashmore, in return, nodded and warbled. They were communicating.

Samantha watched in wonder, and at the same time confusion. This was one of the coolest things she had ever witnessed, but she had no idea what they were saying.

Finally, Lily reached one of her many arms under her body and produced a key ring that she had been hiding in her fur. She held it out to Samantha.

Samantha glanced at Ashmore for confirmation. The dragon nodded. At that, she took the key ring from Lily's furry leg.

"Thanks," she said.

Ashmore gestured with his wing to the door of the storage garage in

front of him. Samantha took out the key ring, looked at the garage number, found the matching key, and unlocked the door.

She then gripped the bottom of the door and lifted. It was heavy, but she was able to get it up. When it was open she stood back and looked inside.

Brian's confused face met her. "Samantha?" he said, falling to his knees.

She couldn't help but grin a little bit. "Hello Brian," she said.

"Y-you're with him?" he asked.

She had to struggle to hold back the laughter. Instead, she just smiled.

Back at Sam's house, Shade was starting to awaken.

He remembered being attacked by a Night Fury, and realizing something just before he passed out, but he couldn't remember what it was. The memory was clouded too much by pain.

The first thing he saw was a face. But it wasn't one he recognized. It was that of a human of about Matt's age. He was tall and skinny, with long, curly brown hair and glasses.

"Who? who are you?" he asked weakly.

The human smiled warmly at him. "Welcome back, Shade. That is your name, right?"

Shade nodded, starting to get a little of his strength back. He tried to sit up, but his muscles were sore, and complained at the act.

"No no, stay still," he said. "You were hurt badly. You need some rest. Here, I brought you something to drink." He passed him a large bowl filled with ice cold water. Seeing it, Shade realized how thirsty he was. He started lapping away at it.

The human patiently waited for him to finish. When he did, he said, "Now, I'm sure you're wondering who I am, and what's going on. All your questions will be answered. But not right now. There's someone else you need to meet.

"I can, however, tell you my name. My name is Sam, and I am the Man in Black."

A storm of emotions flooded Shade. Shock, excitement, fear, anger, and countless others showed up. On the one hand, he was face to face with Sam, Matt's friend from Before, and the one Samantha and the others had been looking for. But on the other hand, he was also their enemy.

Sam must've seen this in his eyes, because he said, "Don't worry. I mean you no harm. This whole conflict was just a big misunderstanding."

Shade felt relief, but at the same time he didn't fully trust his

word. However, he wasn't in a position where he could do anything about it.

"Ah, so you're awake," another voice said. Shade looked towards the voice and watched as a large, purple creature with orange cheeks, orange segments on its arms and legs, and a white underbelly appeared. It had two fins on top of its head, and another, much larger fin that served as a tail. Its right foreleg was wrapped in bloody bandages.

"Hey Swampert," said Sam. He turned to look at the creature, and said, "You need new bandages. Hold on, I'll get you some." He was about to leave, then changed his mind. He leaned in and whispered something in Swampert's ear. Swampert nodded, and then Sam turned to Shade.

"Swampert here will keep you company. He may look intimidating, but don't worry; he's friendly." Sam laughed and left the room.

"We've been wondering when you were going to come around," said Swampert.

"Well, here I am," said Shade. He wasn't sure at all what to think of this.

"I can only imagine how many questions you must have." Swampert lumbered over and sat next to him.

It was true. He had so many. But he focused on the two that were the most important to him.

"Where are my friends?" he asked.

"They're in the prison. At least, that's what we call it. It's really just a bunch of storage garages on the other side of town," Swampert explained. "Don't worry, they're safe. Sam just sent your friend Samantha to get them out."

"Samantha was here?" Shade asked in surprise.

"Yeah. Do you know about her? Apparently, Sam started drawing her years ago, even though he didn't even know she actually existed until today. Strange, huh?"

"Yeah," Shade replied. "That is weird."

They sat in silence for a moment, until Shade said, "There was a Night Fury—"

"Ah, him," Swampert replied.

"Who was it?"

"You'll find out soon enough."

Matt was sitting in his prison, bored out of his mind, when the door started to open.

He immediately stood up, not sure what to expect. When he saw who was behind it, he stared in shock.

"Okay, before you do what everyone else did and accuse me of being a traitor, I'm not," said Samantha.

"Oh thank God," said Matt. And then he noticed the Night Fury next to her. The one that had attacked Shade. "Wait, if you're not a traitor, why the hell is that with you?"

Samantha laughed. "It's a long story," she said. "One I'd be glad to tell you on the way."

"On the way where?"

"To Sam's house." At that, she left.

"Wait, what?" asked Matt. He stepped out of the garage and found himself in the Lyndrich Self-Storage area. _That explains a lot,_ he thought.

"Why are we going to Sam's?" he started to say, but trailed off as he saw something that made him stop and stare in wonder.

In front of him was a Galvantula.

He pointed at it and opened his mouth, trying to say something, but the words wouldn't come out. "That's?" That's a?" he tried to say. "That's a Galvantula!"

"I know right?" came another voice. "This is awesome!"

Matt turned to see Joey walking up to him. "Joey!" he exclaimed. "You're alive!"

"Yeah, and so is everyone else." Matt turned and saw that every member of the group was gathered at the entrance to the self-storage area. Everyone, that is, except Shade.

"Where's Shade?" he asked.

"I'm going to explain that in a second," said Samantha. "I want to say this to everyone at once, to save time."

"Okay," said Matt. He went to stand next to Ben, who was gathered with everyone else. "Hey man," he said. "Good to see you still alive. How are you doing?"

"I almost bit my tongue off and I feel like I have the mother of all hangovers," Ben replied. "Pretty good."

"Alright everyone," Samantha began. "I know you all have a lot of questions, and I'm going to answer them all."

"Oh, oh, I have one!" Ben raised his hand.

Samantha sighed. "What Ben?"

"What's Shade Number Two doing here?" he asked.

"This is who you've all been referring to as the Beast," she answered. "His real name is Ashmore."

The news hit Matt like lightning. "He's Ashmore? That's Ashmore?"

Everyone turned to look at him. "Yeah," said Samantha.

"Oh my God! Does Shade know yet? He's going to be so happy to see him!"

"Wait, what?" asked Kody. "You know him?"

"Shade and Ashmore here were friends before Z-Day," said Matt. "They were separated, and never saw each other again."

Before anyone could reply, Samantha cut in. "Look, we can hear all about this later. Right now, we need to go."

"Where are we going?" asked Andrew.

"Will you please just let me talk?" Samantha complained. "I'm going to answer your questions. Let me start from the beginning."

"The Man in Black took me somewhere different than he did the rest of you. He took me to his house, along with Shade, and gave me hospitality. Do you want to know why? It's because he was the person we came here to find. Well, who I came to find anyway. The Man in Black is Sam."

Murmurs of shock spread through the crowd. "That little bastard," said Ben.

"I knew it," Matt heard Alena say.

He himself was speechless. All this time they had spent wondering where he was, and now finding out they had been fighting him the whole time made him feel like he had been punched in the gut.

"I'm going to choke his appendix," Evan said angrily.

"Anyway, I take it most of you know the whole dispute over my identity, and how he had been drawing me or something. Apparently, he recognized me and brought me back to find out if I was really who he thought I was. Well, I am, and I told him who you all were. He swore to me that he didn't know, and sent me here to get you all."

"Wait, so he thinks that just because he didn't know who we were, it makes up for what he did to us?" asked Trent.

"No, I didn't say that Trent," Samantha replied. "He feels horrible about it, and I'm sure now that he knows who we are, he'll give you your stupid flash drive back. Now, are there any more questions?"

"Yeah," said Jean. "What the fuck is that?" He pointed at the Galvantula.

"That's a Galvantula," Samantha replied. "Her name is Lily."

"How the hell did he get a Galvantula?" asked Joey.

"Honestlyâ€¦ I have no clue. But I'm sure he'd be happy to tell us once we get there. Now, are you guys coming or not?"

Sam had finished replacing Swampert's bandages, and the two of them and Shade had been sitting around each other and talking for a while now. At some point, someone else joined their group. She was short, and was wearing a large baggy yellow sweatshirt and pants of the same style. The hood was hanging behind her, revealing an inhuman, orange face with dark eyelids, and red hair that stuck up in a Mohawk-like fashion. Shade noticed a few fresh bruises on her face. Her clothing left her midsection visible as well, revealing orange skin with a scaly, dark grey belly. Her pants also extended now to reveal a tail.

"Ah, Elizabeth," Sam greeted. "How are you doing?"

Elizabeth nodded, signaling that she was okay. Shade thought to himself that she really was a strange looking creature, but didn't dare say it out loud. She looked like she had a temper.

"You look like you got in a fight," said Swampert. "Did you actually lose?"

"No," she replied gruffly. She glared at Shade. "Your friend just put up more of a fight than the rest."

Swampert responded by raising his leg and showing them his gunshot wound. "I wouldn't go so far as to say that." He chuckled.

Shade vaguely remembered seeing Matt sparring with someone out of the corner of his eye. "So it was you that he was fighting?" he asked.

"Correction: it was she that he was beating. He would've won if Sam hadn't interfered," Swampert teased.

Elizabeth scowled. "I would've won. I didn't need his help."

"You keep telling yourself that," Swampert said.

Elizabeth walked over to him and punched him in the shoulder with a surprising amount of force.

"Ow!" Swampert exclaimed. Next to him, Sam laughed.

"That's what you get, bastard."

Shade decided to just cut to the chase. "So," he began. "Do you mind telling me why you've been hunting us down?"

Swampert's expression immediately grew serious. "Well," he said, attempting to explain. After careful consideration, he finally said, "We thought you were a threat. And threats have to be dealt with."

"All we wanted was Trent's flash drive back," Shade told him. "Why couldn't you just give it to us? Then none of this would've happened."

"Look," Swampert replied. "What we did may have been wrong. But you

destroyed GLaDOS, and to us that was an act of war. She was a bitch, yes, and probably deserved it, but that lab was the center of what we were trying to accomplish, and she was essential to it.

"We know it would've been incredibly hard to escape without killing her. And we knew what we did was wrong. We didn't want to- we really didn't- but we had no choice. You were already in too deep for us to get you out, no matter how much we wanted to."

"I wish I knew what you guys were saying," Sam said longingly.

Swampert glanced at him for a moment, and then returned to Shade. "I guess we were hoping that we could get even with you, warn you away and then be done with it. The flash drive Sam took from your friend? We knew it was important. It was in the way he reacted when we took it."

"Eye for an eye," Elizabeth pitched in.

"What I'm trying to say- what we're trying to say- is that we're sorry," said Swampert. "We did things we wish we could take back, and we brought this whole thing on ourselves. We are so sorry_."

Shade was silent, letting the words sink in. "I don't know if I can forgive you that easily," he said, his head down.

Swampert smiled sadly. "I understand," he said.

Shade reflected on all of this. The truth was, he liked these people. They were good; he knew that now. But that didn't mean they hadn't done bad things.

"In our defense, we did warn you to stay away," Swampert said. "Multiple times."

Shade snapped his head up to look at him. "What?" he asked.

"I said we warned you."

"No you didn't," Shade stated with conviction. "We never heard about that."

"Well we passed the message onto your friendâ€¦ what was his nameâ€¦ Trent, I think."

It was then that Shade realized the truth. "Are you lying to me?" he asked.

Swampert frowned in confusion. "No," he said. "I swear to you, I'm not lying."

"Then that meansâ€¦"

Trent had been.

Well, he hadn't lied, but he hadn't been honest either. Because of the consequences of his actions, what Trent had done was just as bad.

Although they didn't know it, Shade and Alena now had a common enemy.

Just then, they heard voices. They were coming from outside of the window.

Instantly, Sam stood up and looked outside. "They're here," he said. He turned to Swampert and Elizabeth and said, "What do you say, guys? Want to show him who gave him those scars?"

Anger rose in Shade's chest, as the others nodded and began to help him to his feet. _Yeah, _he thought as they helped him walk to the window. _I'm gonna give this dragon a piece of my mind. He's-_

The train of thought died in his head, and the anger dissipated as quickly as it had come. All of it was nothing to him, once he saw who was waiting for him outside.

"Ashmore," he said faintly.

He blinked a few times, wondering if he wasn't just imagining it. But it was real.

It was _real_.

On the cracked pavement below, Ashmore glanced up at the window and met his eyes. At that moment, the nothingness inside Shade bloomed into life. A tidal wave of wonderful emotions assaulted his consciousness, and he almost collapsed.

"Ashmore," he said, more strongly this time.

He couldn't take it anymore. He had to go down there.

He turned from the window and bounded towards the stairs. Despite his incredibly sore muscles and screaming cuts, the sight of his friend had filled him with more strength than he ever knew he had. He felt like he could fly miles or slay a thousand zombies if it meant he could get there any quicker.

Behind him, he heard the sound of Sam laughing. Swampert's chuckles echoed with him, but he hardly paid any attention. When he reached the bottom of the stairs, he stumbled out of the tight passage and almost fell over. But he kept running.

Finally, he reached the door. He bounded out into the open towards his friend, wings stretching out. His human friends ducked out of the way around him, but he hardly realized they were there.

Ashmore was waiting for him. He sat on his haunches, grinning at the sight of his old friend. Shade collided into him, tackling him into the ground and wrapping his wings around him in an embrace.

"You're alive," he said, tears of joy in his eyes. "I never thought I'd see you again."

Ashmore laughed, and hugged him back. Then, he gently pushed his friend off. Shade rolled onto his side and lay there, gazing at his friend with warm eyes.

Around them, people were watching. But they didn't care. To them, the world only existed of each other at that moment.

"I'm sorry," said Ashmore. "I'm so, so sorry." A tear formed in his eye, and glided down his scaly cheek. "I swear I didn't realize it was you until it was too late. I was so caught up in the momentâ€¦"

Shade knew he ought to be mad. But he couldn't find it in himself. All negative feeling had been temporarily driven out of his mind.

"It's okay," he said. "The scars will heal. I forgive you."

"Thank you," said Ashmore.

"I have so much to tell you," said Shade. "So much has happened since we last saw each other."

"Same here," said Ashmore. "But not now. There's going to be a commotion any second now."

And he was right. As soon as Sam stepped out of his house, all eyes were on him.

There was an awkward silence at first. Nobody was really sure what to say. They were torn between happiness at seeing their old friend and anger for what he had done to him.

Finally, the silence was broken by Sam. "I am so, so sorry," he said. A tear of guilt formed in his eye and ran down his cheek.

The group's silence was then broken by angry footsteps. A gap in the crowd appeared, and Evan marched angrily up to Sam.

"You dirty rotten no-good bastard motherfucker!" he exclaimed. He swung his fist, and it collided with Sam's face with so much force he fell to the ground, crying out in pain.

"Are you going to do something about that?" asked Shade.

"Nah, I was expecting it. Well, maybe not _that_, but I knew it wasn't going to be pretty," Ashmore replied. "He deserved it, anyway." Shade thought he heard an undertone of hostility in his voice, and wondered what was going on between the two of them.

Evan shook his fist a few times and remarked, "That felt good." Then, he held out his hand to help Sam up. "We're cool, man."

"Thanks," said Sam, dazed, as he pulled himself up, blood dripping from his nose.

"Okay, now it's my turn," someone else said. As Shade, watched, Trent made his way to the front of the crowd. And boy did he look pissed. He pushed Evan out of the way. The boy stumbled backward and almost fell, but managed to keep his balance. Trent shoved Sam backwards and pinned him to the wall next to the house's front door.

"Look," he seethed. "For some reason, my friends seem like they're almost ready to forgive you. But don't think you'll win me over that

easily." He held his finger up to Sam's face. "You give it back, and we might just be cool."

"Give what back?" Sam asked nervously.

"You know damn well what!" Trent yelled. "The flash drive!"

"Ohâ€|" Sam said, trying to find the words. "Funny story about thatâ€|"

"Just tell me where the damn flash drive is!"

"I can't!"

"Why the fuck not?"

"Because I don't have it!" Sam replied.

There was a moment of silence. A dangerous silence. Everyone could feel the tension in the air.

"What?" asked Trent, his voice perilously calm.

"I lost it while I was in town," Sam explained. "It could be _anywhere_. It's long gone!"

* * *

><p>So, what do you think of that?

As always, next chapter this Sunday! Until then, let me know what you think!

32. Chapter Thirty-One: Reunited

Well! I'm truly sorry about that, but it looks like the story is back on track!

I'm all settled into college now, and while I'm still getting used to everything, I managed to squeeze this into my schedule. My uploads might be a little erratic in the future, but I'll try my best to adhere to the set Sunday-Wednesday schedule.

In the meantime, here's chapter Thirty-One!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.

* * *

><p>Chapter Thirty-One:

Reunited

Lyndrich, New Hampshire

Everything was quiet. The silence was uncomfortable, yet nobody dared to break it. Everyone was holding their breath, waiting for Trent to lose it.

And lose it he did.

"Are you fucking KIDDING ME?!" he yelled in Sam's face. He pulled Sam off the wall and threw him onto the ground. "DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'VE DONE?"

Sam raised his hands to defend himself, but it wasn't enough. Trent descended upon him, fists flying. At first, Ashmore did nothing, but after it went by for what seemed like a whole minute, he decided to act. He stood up and roared at him. Shade stood up after him, just barely able to stand on his feet.

Ashmore pushed through the crowd and jumped at Trent, knocking him off of Sam and pinning him to the ground. He extended his teeth and roared in his face.

"Help me!" he yelled.

Lucas stepped forward to help, but Alena stuck out her arm and held him back. In a fury, she walked forward and stared Trent in the eyes.

"Why should we help you?" she asked. "As I recall, you're the one who let us into this mess."

"What are you talking about?" he asked. "It's his fault!"

"Yes, but it's also yours," she said. "He did bad things. But as I remember hearing, he warned you. Several times."

"Is that true, Trent?" asked Kody in disbelief.

Trent ignored him. "Call him off, Sam," he said.

"No!" Alena exclaimed. "Not until you admit it."

"Call him off!"

"Admit it!" Alena stomped on his hand and he yelled in pain. When Alena lifted her foot, he gasped, "Fine. It's true. It happened. Now will you please get this thing off of me?"

Alena looked at Sam, who was now standing dizzily. His face was bruised and bloody, but he was otherwise fine.

"It's his choice," he said. "I can ask, but he might not listen to me."

It seemed Ashmore was in a forgiving mood. He backed up off of the man and sat on his haunches, waiting. Trent shakily stood up and brushed dirt and snow off of his clothes.

"What the fuck man?" Lucas asked. "That was not cool!"

"What does it matter?" Trent grumbled. "You all probably would've come anyway. I would've convinced you."

"Well I don't know about these guys," said Andrew. "But I want to know what I'm getting into first. You have no idea how bad of a night I had!"

Trent looked over the accusing faces. "You know what?" he said. "Fuck you guys. I'm trying to save the world, and yeah, I keep one secret. Sometimes good things come with a price. But here you all are up my ass for just trying to help!" he was almost yelling now. "Well guess what? I don't need this shit! I'm gone!"

He shoved past Alena and walked around Ashmore, heading down the street. "Come on man," said Ben. "Don't just walk off like that!"

Trent turned around to face him. "I'm sorry Ben," he said. "But it looks like you're the only good guy left here."

Without another word, he turned- only to face another obstacle. While he had his back turned, Shade had stood up. He was weakened, but had been gradually getting his strength back, and now had enough to stand up to Trent. No matter how mad he was, he wasn't just going to let him leave.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" asked Trent. "Get the fuck out of my way, you stupid piece of lab trash."

Any ounce of kindness in Shade was drained at that sentence. It was replaced by white hot fury. He roared in anger, and ran at Trent, claws extended. Trent turned back just in time to run, and Shade's first leap missed. But he wouldn't be able to outrun the second.

Just then, Shade froze in midair. Roaring in surprise, he tried to slash out at Trent, or at least touch the ground, but he couldn't.

"What the fuck?" Jean said.

"Shade, what's wrong?" Matt asked.

But Shade wasn't listening. In fact, he seemed to have stopped paying attention to his situation, and appeared to be listening to something.

With a shake of his head, he snapped out of his trance and began clawing at Trent again. But his paws never made it close enough. He was suspended in the air.

Trent managed to overcome his shock, and walked around the floating dragon. He shook his head and kept walking down the street. Shade struggled to go after him, but couldn't move.

"Trent!" Sam yelled. "Don't you need a gun?"

Trent stopped in his tracks, hesitating for a moment. Then he turned around. "Fuck off," he said, venom dripping in his words.

They stood there and watched him go. Since his ankle had been sprained the night before, he was limping. Meanwhile, the more time passed, the more Shade seemed to calm down. Eventually, whatever bond was holding him in the air broke and he dropped to the ground. He sat there, breathing in deeply, trying to calm down.

When Tim was out of sight, Lucas broke the silence. "He'll be back," he said. "He doesn't even have a damn gun."

"Someone should go after him," said Kody.

"Nah, he needs time to cool off," said Jeremy.

Shade was breathing deeply. The anger was flowing out of him, and it was being replaced by guilt.

"Breatheâ€¦ Just calm down," _said the voice in his head.

_Thank you, _he thought, hoping the voice would hear him. _Thank you for not letting me kill him._

"Don't mention it,"_ the voice replied. He felt the presence recede, and he dropped to the ground.

Shade felt someone nudge his shoulder, and turned to see Ashmore. "Hey," he said.

"Are you okay, 2-9?" Ashmore asked.

Shade shook his head. "I tried to kill himâ€¦" he said.

"Look, it's not _entirely_ your fault," said Ashmore. "You were just trying to keep him from leaving. What he said was horrible, and it would've set me off too."

"Really?" Shade asked.

"Really."

They were silent for a moment, content to just enjoy each other's company. Then Ashmore broke the silence.

"It's nice to see you again, 2-9," he said. "It really is."

Despite everything, Shade grinned. "It's nice to see you too," he said.

Suddenly, something clicked in his head. Ashmore's scent was filling his nostrils. It was a familiar scent, yet not just from their time in the lab, but from somewhere much more recentâ€¦

Then he remembered. Aperture Laboratories. He had forgotten this due to the gas he had inhaled, but now the memories came back.

Ashmore had been there, pinning him down.

"Why did you leave me there, Ashmore?" he asked. He tried not to sound accusing; he knew his friend must have had a good reason.

He saw his friend's head lower in shame. "Iâ€¦ I didn't want to. In fact, I tried to stop Sam. But he wouldn't listenâ€¦ I know he did what he thought was right, butâ€¦ I still haven't been able to forgive him for it."

Then he looked at Shade. "Butâ€¦ Now that I know you're okay, things are a little clearerâ€¦ I think I might be able to soon."

He then explained what Sam's plan was, and why he had left him there. And Shade realized just why they had done all the bad things they had done.

"I'm sorry, 2-9," he said. Shade could see that he meant it.

"I forgive you," he said. "And by the way, my name isn't 2-9 anymore. It's Shade."

"Okay," said Ashmore. "Shadeâ€¦ I like that name. Anyway, I need to introduce you to some friends I've made."

"I've already met Swampert and Elizabeth," said Shade. "So maybe you could start by telling me who that voice in my head was?"

Ashmore gave a hearty chuckle. "Ah, Reuniclus," he said. "She's quite an interesting character."

"Oh I bet," said Shade. "Seeing as she froze me in mid-air and started talking in my head."

"Yeah, she does that," said Ashmore. "And here she is now!"

Shade turned to where Ashmore was looking and saw her. She was a strange-looking being; a pale, baby-like creature with two eyes and a mouth, surrounded in a blue membrane filled with what looked like some sort of fluid. The membrane extended to form two three-fingered arms, which contained a chain of spheres leading away from her body. The first two were the same pale color, the third was green, and the last was light blue. Lastly, two ear-like objects floated above her head within the membrane.

"Hello, Shade,"_ she said. Although really, she didn't say anything. But Shade heard it in his mind.

"She's telepathic," Ashmore explained, seeing the look of shock on Shade's face.

"Hey," he greeted. "Hello Reuniclus. It's nice to meet you." Shade bowed his head in greeting.

"Both of you, come inside. The others are waiting to meet the newcomers."_

"Yes, but before we do that, let's introduce him to Lily," said Ashmore. He led Shade through the crowd to someone he hadn't noticed before- a huge, yellow spider.

"Lily, this is my old friend Shade. You remember me telling you about him?"

"Yeah, I remember him," she said. "I'm sorry I chased you through the woods. I hope we can forget that and move forward."

"Oh, so that was_ you_," said Shade. "What exactly did you do to Alex and Jeremy?"

"I paralyzed them," Lily replied.

"How?" Shade asked.

"She can produce electricity. Sometimes she uses it to paralyze her enemies," Ashmore explained.

"That isâ€¦ pretty cool actually," said Shade.

While the dragons were talking with Lily, the humans were deep in their own conversation.

The hard feelings were starting to die down. Apologies had been passed around, and for the most part accepted. At first, the mood had been grim. The flash drive was gone, and they all knew that that meant hope might be lost.

But at that time, the joy of seeing their friend again canceled the negative emotions out, and the mood began to get lighter. Now, Sam was explaining to them what had just happened to Shade.

"So let me get this straight," said Anthony. "You genetically engineered _PokÃ©mon_."

"Pretty much," said Sam.

"Prove it," he said.

"Well, there's Lily, a _Galvantula_ right there," he said. "And Reuniclus over there. She was the one who was holding Shade back."

Matt immediately turned to see, as did everyone else. It was true. Floating in midair not ten feet away was a shiny Reuniclus.

"Oh my God!" he said. "That's amazing!"

"Wait, is she _really_ psychic?" asked Joey.

"Why don't you tell me?"

They were all startled as they heard a strange, feminine voice in their heads. "Holy cow shit," Joey exclaimed.

Next to them, Sam started laughing hysterically.

"She has fucking _telepathy?_" asked Kody.

"Yes, of course!" Sam replied. "She's a psychic type! Now, let's go inside. There's some more people I want you to meet, and I need to wash my face." With that, he walked inside.

Hesitantly, everyone else followed him. Ben turned to Matt and said, "What the fuck is going on? This doesn't even feel real anymore! Man, I feel like this is all in some weird-ass story you would write or something!" He walked off before Matt could say anything else.

Matt turned to where Shade was and saw that he was just starting to walk weakly towards the house. "Shade!" he called. "Hold up!"

The dragons stopped and waited for him. "Are you okay?" he asked.

Shade nodded, and Matt reached into his pocket and took out some painkillers. He had put some in his pocket before they had left, just in case Shade needed them, and was relieved to find that they were still there. He had figured they might be there for a while. He gave him some, and then the Night Fury turned to Ashmore and murmured. Matt could only guess at what he was saying. Ashmore then stepped forward and bowed his head in greeting. Matt returned the gesture and said, "Hello, Ashmore. Shade's told me all about you."

Ashmore chuckled a little bit. Then, the three of them, along with Lily walked inside with the rest.

Sam was in the bathroom, wiping the blood off of his face with his towels. The group was waiting in the now extremely crowded living room. When Sam was done, he made his way over to the other side of the room and disappeared through a doorway.

"Where's he off to?" asked Brian.

"Who knows?" Ben replied.

They waited for a minute, talking amongst themselves, until Sam returned. Everyone immediately fell silent as they saw what was with him.

Behind him was a massive shiny Swampert.

"Holy fucking shit!" Alex yelled.

Everyone was silent for almost a minute. Then, the silence was broken by Jeremy. "That does it. I'm obviously having a pot dream."

"I wish you were, dude," said Anthony. "I wish you were."

Once the Swampert entered the room, someone else followed him. It was a Scrafty.

"Okay honestly at this point I'm not even surprised anymore," said Ben. "This is just getting old."

For the next several minutes, they all conversed with each other, catching up. Eventually, the last two Pokémons joined them.

The first was Jack. She entered the room very casually, seemingly oblivious to the stares she was attracting. Of all of them, Jack was the strangest looking. She literally resembled a living, floating chandelier, with black arms and fire coming off of the end. There was also fire on top of her head. Since she was shiny, her head was green and the fire was orange.

Later, the last of them came. He came invisible, without warning. One minute, everything was normal, and the next, Kody was knocked off of his feet and being dragged across the room.

"Holy shit!" he yelled. "What the fuck is going on?"

Next to them, Sam was laughing hysterically. "Gengar!" he yelled. "Knock it off!"

Kody stopped moving, and he struggled to his feet, gasping. "What the fuck just happened?" he panicked.

Behind him, a figure materialized out of nowhere. It was about four feet tall with a round, dark purple body, a spikey, fur-covered back, and a short, stubby tail. It also had red, mischievous-looking eyes.

"Holy shit! It's a Gengar!" Matt exclaimed.

Gengar floated across the room and hovered next to Evan, looking at him. He nodded, and then reached out his hand. Evan took it, and Gengar gave a shake before disappearing again.

"What the fuck just happened?" Evan asked.

"I think that was his way of apologizing," Sam answered.

"For what?"

"For possessing you and using your body to beat your friend."

Nick sat upright. "That was it? The thing that took over Evan's mind? Oh _fuck _no."

For while, they kept talking to each other. Eventually, Matt and Sam started talking to each other alone.

"I can't believe you're still alive, Sam," said Matt. "And I can't believe what you've done."

"I know," said Sam. "I can hardly believe it either. And I hear you made a new friend as well."

Matt glanced over at Shade, who was hanging out with Ashmore and some of the PokÃ©mon. "Yeah," he said. "It's amazing, isn't it? I knew my dragon obsession would pay off someday."

Sam grinned. "Yep," he said. "How cool is it though that we _both_ met Night Furies that just so happened to be long lost friends with each other?"

"Very cool," Matt agreed.

They exchanged stories after that, each of them listening to the other with undivided attention. After that, they returned to the group.

By the end of that day, almost all hard feelings within the group had dissipated. For hours, they stayed inside talking and laughing, enjoying each other's company. But as it was starting to get dark out, they realized something. They wouldn't all be able to stay in Sam's house. So, they all decided to go to different houses and meet there in the morning.

The group split up for the night. After reclaiming their weapons from Sam's armory in his parent's old bedroom, Ben, Anthony and Lucas went to Ben's house, Andrew, Kody, Jean and Jeremy went to Andrew's house, and Nick, Evan and Alex went to Evan's house. Finally, only Matt, Shade, Joey, Brian, Samantha and Alena were left.

It was starting to get dark. "You mind if we stay here?" asked Samantha.

"Actually, my house is a little full," Sam replied. "Sorry."

"That's okay, I've got room," Matt offered. "You guys can crash at my place."

"Thanks," said Joey.

"Anyway, before we go, I'd like to ask you a question, Sam," Matt said.

"And what would that be?" Sam asked.

"What the hell did you do with my stuff?"

Sam laughed. "Don't worry, I took care of it. Me and Ashmore have watched How To Train Your Dragon multiple times, in fact."

"You know, I was going to show that to Shade, but when I got home I found out that someone had taken it."

Sam frowned. "Sorry," he said.

"Ah, well, that's something we'll have to do then."

Matt turned and saw that Shade, Ashmore, and all of the Pokémon had congregated into a corner of the room. He wasn't sure what they were doing, but he had an idea they were socializing.

"Looks like he's made some new friends," Matt commented.

And that's how the rest of the night went, until they had to leave. It was getting late, and they were tired. Luckily for them, they had a much faster way of getting around.

"Hey, Shade, can you take us back to my house?" Matt asked.

Shade nodded, and said goodbye to Ashmore. He left the house, and the rest of them followed.

With directions from Matt, he took Brian and Joey back first. He was still sore, but some of the pain had receded, and he was able to fly for a short period of time now. When they left, Samantha turned to Sam.

"You never told me what you knew," she said.

"You're right. I haven't," he said. "Everyone's been talking to me; I haven't gotten the chance."

"That's okay," she replied. "I wanted to talk to you alone anyway."

"This isn't really alone," Sam pointed out.

"It doesn't matter. It's close enough."

"Wellâ€¦" Sam began. "There isn't really _that_ much to it. About two to three years ago, I started writing a graphic novel. It was about PokÃ©mon, and I decided to put alter-egos of myself and my friends in. I decided on a whim to make myself female, and, well, that's when I came up with you.

"I've used you in drawings and video games ever since. But I never thought for one second that you might be a real person," Sam concluded. "That's all I know. I'm sorry."

"Oh," said Samantha, disappointed. "That doesn't really answer anything."

"I'm sorry," Sam repeated. Then, he remembered something. "Wait," he asked. "You don't happen to have a fear of thunder, do you?"

"I do, actuallyâ€¦" Samantha trailed off. "Whyâ€¦?"

"Because the Samantha I invented was afraid of thunder too."

They talked for another few minutes before Shade returned. This time, he took Alena and Samantha, leaving Matt and Sam alone.

"It's good to see you again, Sam," said Matt. "I know I ought to be pissed, but honestly I'm glad it turned out to be you."

Sam smiled. "Thanks," he said. "I'm sorry about all that."

"Tell me though. Why exactly did you have to leave us for dead in Aperture?"

"Wait, were you one of those?" Sam asked, his face turning grim.

"Yeah," Matt replied.

"Oh my Godâ€¦ I'm so sorry. If I had knownâ€¦"

"No, it's okay. I forgive you, as long as you tell me why you did it."

"Wellâ€¦ We sort of made a deal with GLaDOS," Sam explained. "We were allowed to use the machines there- they were how we created the PokÃ©mon- if we got her test subjects. But we decided not to get her any; we ended up telling her that we couldn't find anybody. She was starting to get suspicious, though, and then you three just walked right into her trap. There was nothing we could do. Ashmore even tried to save Shade, but I had to stop him. If I had known it was you, thoughâ€¦"

Matt cut him off. "It's okay. I forgive you."

"Thanks. But really, I need to explain something. There's this overall plan that I have. Honestly, it's huge. I don't know if I can pull it off. But if I can, it's beautifulâ€¦"

They talked for a little bit longer, as Sam explained his plan. He was right; it was beautiful. Sam wanted to fill the entire world with PokÃ©mon if he could. And Matt found himself able to truly forgive him then, as he realized that he would have done the same

thing.

They continued talking until Shade arrived. Matt and Sam said goodbye, and Matt climbed onto Shade's back. "Tomorrow, I want to get to know your friends a little better," said Matt.

Sam chuckled. "Okay," he said. "See you then!"

Shade took off, and they flew peacefully to Matt's house. "I'm glad you found your friend again, Shade," he said.

Shade crooned happily, and Matt smiled, knowing that even though the flash drive was gone, for a time at least, everything just might be okay.

When they reached his house, they landed and Matt slid off of Shade's back. They let themselves in, and checked it for any intruders. They found it to be all clear. So, they took pieces of furniture and blocked off all of the doors.

"Okay," Matt said when they were done. "Me and Shade are going to sleep in my bedroom. The rest of you can sleep wherever you want. I'm going to bed now, goodnight."

That night, Sam was sitting in his living room, alone.

The past few nights had been like this. Ever since he had left Shade and the others to die in Aperture, guilt had been eating away at him, and Ashmore had been giving him the silent treatment. His best friend in the entire world was not even talking to him. It hurt more than he could've imagined

Suddenly, he heard a noise, and looked up to see the large, ebony dragon staring at him. But it wasn't anger that he saw in his eyes.

It was regret.

"I'm sorry, Ashmore," said Sam mournfully. "I wish things didn't have to happen like they did."

Ashmore said nothing. He merely walked over to the boy and nudged him gently.

I forgive you.

A tear of happiness formed in Sam's eye, and he hugged the dragon with joy. "Thank you," he said.

The next morning, Lucas, Ben and Anthony arrived Sam's house first.

"I still don't understand why you had to drag us with you," Ben complained.

"Because I can't leave you two alone," Lucas replied. He removed the cigarette he was smoking from his mouth and held it in his fingers. "A stoner and a borderline alcoholic, alone in this world? No thanks. Besides, we need to know if he's back yet."

"Look, you violated the rule," said Ben. "So no matter what, I'm going to be mad."

"What rule?" said Lucas. "I didn't break no fucking rule."

"Yeah, you did. The rule about waking me up."

"Well it's not my fault you can't sleep at night."

"It's your fault for waking up the alcoholic insomniac."

They finally reached Sam's house. Just before Lucas knocked on the door, he asked, "So you're sure we won't be waking anybody?"

"Look, I don't know about his Pokemon friends, but Sam rarely sleeps past seven o'clock," Ben replied.

Lucas knocked on the door. For a few seconds, there was nothing, and then he heard footsteps. The door opened and Sam greeted them.

"Hey," he said. He frowned as he saw Ben. "You're up early," he said.

Ben shrugged. "They made me," he said. "They're cruel and heartless bastards."

"Well, come in," said Sam. He opened the door wider and let them in.

In the living room, Ashmore and Swampert were sitting on the floor in front of the TV. Elizabeth was sitting on a couch, and the others were nowhere to be seen.

"Where do they go, anyway?" asked Anthony. "When they're not here?"

"Oh, around," said Sam. "We like to scout the town and kill off the zombies, and keep the Gunnerville people out."

"So, has Trent come back yet?" asked Lucas.

"No, I don't think so," said Sam. He turned to Ashmore and the Pok mon. "Do any of you know if Trent is back?" he asked.

They shook their heads.

Sam turned back to Lucas. "Sorry," he said.

Lucas shrugged. "It's all cool," he said.

They socialized for a while, waiting for the others to arrive. Matt, Shade, Joey, Brian, Samantha and Alena arrived first, followed by Nick, Evan and Alex. Andrew, Kody and Jean arrived last. Each time, Lucas would ask them the same question, and each time, the answer would be no. Nobody had seen Trent.

Once everyone had arrived- and said no- he made a decision.

The rest were discussing something else. Lyndrich seemed to be the safest place for them now, and they decided that this would be their new home. Yet most of their belongings were in Norbury. They were discussing who would go to get it when Lucas spoke up.

"You guys do that," he said. "I'm going after Trent."

"Shit, I forgot about that," said Kody.

"I'll come with you," Ben offered.

"No," Lucas declined. "I have a way of reaching people like him. But if more than one person goes, it might make things worse. I need to do this myself."

"But what if you get attacked?" Sam asked.

Lucas chuckled. "I survived months on my own, with no partners, or dragons, or Pok  mon. I think I can make it for one more day."

"How do you know he's still in Lyndrich?" asked Andrew.

"He's got nowhere else to go," Lucas replied. "And he had no weapon. Unless he found one, he's most likely still around here somewhere. And I think I know where to look first."

"Where's that?" asked Sam.

"The police station. He'll need a weapon, and what better place to look for one, in a small town like this? That's where I'd be headed first."

Eventually, they all realized that they wouldn't be able to persuade him otherwise. He was going, whether they liked it or not.

"Good luck out there," said Matt.

"I don't believe in luck," Lucas stated. He held up his automatic. "I believe in ammo."

He left, just like that.

They didn't hear from either him or Trent for a while after that. For the next hour or so, they talked, much like they did the previous night. A party was sent to Norbury to reclaim their belongings, and the rest just hung around. The humans and the Pok  mon got to know each other more. Matt and Samantha got along particularly well with Swampert, and Ben got along well with Gengar. Really, everyone made a new friend that day, except Elizabeth. She was still trying to get used to the newcomers.

After that, Sam decided to show them the security devices he had put in place. Leaving only Lily and Reuniclus behind to watch the house, he and his friends led them to the town border, where he showed them a hidden sensor he had buried underground.

"Those military people had all kinds of good stuff with them," said Sam. "They would set these up around their camps to warn them of zombie trespassers. They're motion sensors. If anyone crosses the border, one of us will know."

"How the hell do you power these things?" asked Alex.

"You can thank the military for that, too," said Sam, smiling. "They had a large supply of solar panels. I've set them up here and there. Also, I found this transmitter thing. GLaDOS figured out how to contact it somehow, because every once in a while she would send us a message to remind us of ourâ€¦ 'arrangement'."

Samantha frowned. "If you have solar panels, why were you using the generator the other day?"

"I like to be conservative," said Sam. I have a few solar panels left, but in order to power my house I would have to use the rest of them. And if one of these breaks, I wouldn't have any replacements. The only one I use at my house is used to power the motion sensors' receptors."

After that, they made their way back. When they arrived, they entered the house, only to see the last person they expected to see sitting on his couch.

"Hey guys," said Trent glumly. "I'm sorry I was such a dick." He stood up, and thought out his next words carefully. "I should've told you what we were dealing with. And I'm sorry I called you a piece of lab trash, Shade. Can you forgive me?"

There was an awkward silence. It was finally broken by Ben.

"Look man, that was an asshole thing to do, butâ€¦ I think I'll get past it; if only because you made awesome music."

Trent smiled. "Thanks," he said. He turned to Shade. "What about you?"

The dragon thought about it, and then nodded.

"So where did you go?" asked Alex.

"Well, as I was walking down the street, I realized how dumb I had been by not taking a gun," said Trent. "So I figured, where better a place to get one than the police station? Ended up holding up there until I decided to come back and apologize."

"So Lucas was right," said Jeremy. "Where is he?"

Trent looked confused. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Lucas came to get you, right? He said he was going to the police station to see if you were there."

Trent frowned. "No, there must be a mistake. Lucas never came to the police station."

"Well, where is he then?" asked Ben.

Trent shook his head in confusion. "I don't know."

* * *

><p>Hope you liked it! And I hope to see you again on Sunday!

33. Chapter Thirty-Two: The General

****Alright, here's chapter thirty-two!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon****

* * *

><p>Chapter Thirty-Two:

****The General****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

_"__Sam, thank God you're back," _they heard Reuniclus's voice say.

Sam immediately looked to the left, up the stairway, and saw Reuniclus coming down.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

_"__The motion detectors on the border with Hampstead went off. A lot of them."_

"Are you sure it's not the guys who went to Norbury?"

_"__No, there's too many of them, and they came from a completely different direction."_

"God damn it!" Sam cursed. "Where's Lily?"

_"__She went to go investigate. She hasn't gotten back yet."_

Sam sighed. "How long ago was this?"

_"__Just a few minutes ago," _she replied.

"Oh my Godâ€|" said Sam in exasperation. "Matt, we need to get there quickly. Can you and Shade come with us?"

"Sure," said Matt.

"Alright. Come on, Reuniclus. We're going to find out what's happening. Everyone else stay and look after the motion sensors. Let's go."

Ashmore, Shade, Matt, Sam and Reuniclus met outside while Sam explained the situation to them. "This could be bad," he said. "I don't need to explain this to you two," he gestured to Ashmore and Reuniclus, "But you twoâ€|" he gestured to Matt and Shade. "â€|are new around here. You're here to back me up in case I get in trouble."

"What's going on?" asked Matt.

"Hopefully just a lot of zombies crossing the border," said Sam. "But we have to plan for the worst."

"Which is?"

"Gunnerville. They might be repaying me for burning down their wall."

Matt grinned. "I forgot about that. Good job," he complimented.

"Thank you. But that's beside the point. We need to get over there and see what's going on, and if they _are _invading, we need to be ready."

"Shitâ€|" said Matt. "I thought we just might have been done with them."

"Never underestimate your opponents," said Sam. Carlton is dead, I know that, but I don't know who else you killed. His second in command is an idiot, but if you killed himâ€| We might be in trouble."

"Why?" asked Matt.

"His third, Maverick I believe, is much more capable than he was. Put him in power, and Gunnerville will get much more dangerous. But we don't have time to talk about that now. We have to go."

He climbed onto Ashmore's back, and Reuniclus floated up to him. Matt climbed onto Shade, and the two dragons took off.

Ashmore took the lead in front of them, and Shade followed closely behind. It was only a few minutes before they saw something on the ground. Someone was walking down there.

Ahead of them, Sam gestured that they were landing, and Ashmore dropped. Shade followed, and they landed in a clearing near the walker.

Matt slid off of Shade's back and ran over to where Sam was dismounting. "Was that one of them?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Sam. "Let's go find out."

The person had been on a road, and their clearing was in the middle of the forest next to it. Slowly and quietly, they crept through the trees, keeping low to the ground to avoid being seen. It was almost late afternoon, and long shadows were being formed that helped them to blend in.

They finally reached the road, hidden in a patch of snowy undergrowth, just in time to see the person walk by. Matt gasped as he saw that it was Lucas.

The man was walking down the road, gun in hand, smoking a cigarette. He was muttering something to himself. Matt started to move towards him, but a scaly arm held him back. He looked to see Shade glaring at him in warning, his ears pricked up.

What? He mouthed.

The dragon gestured down the road. Matt looked down and saw nothing for a second, and then heard the sound of a truck's engine.

As it grew louder, he began to pick up the sounds of multiple trucks. He could see that Lucas heard it too, because he stopped and aimed his gun.

In no time, a convoy of five heavily armored trucks appeared. They rolled down the road straight towards Lucas. Matt turned back, expecting him to get out of their way. But he didn't.

Instead, he just stood there and lowered his gun. Matt could've sworn he saw him smile.

The convoy stopped about twenty feet away from him. The doors of the front car flew open, and armed men poured out. There must've been at least fifteen of them. At first, Matt thought they might've been from Gunnerville. But the more he saw, the more he realized they couldn't have been.

Their armor was much more advanced than anything the Gunnerville people could've pulled together. It was black, and the sun glinted off of it, signifying some sort of metallic substance. The armor covered their entire bodies from head to toe; even their face was covered by a black screen.

Their guns looked highly advanced as well. Matt was no expert, but he would have been willing to put money on the assumption that they were incredibly powerful.

They surrounded Lucas, guns raised. The man submitted, dropping his gun and raising his hands into the air.

Then, another soldier emerged from the truck. This one had a commanding aura about them, and Matt guessed that they were their leader.

The soldier approached Lucas, gun holstered and hands behind his back, and pushed through the ring. He stood directly in front of Lucas, who smiled at him.

"Hello, General," he said. "Nice to see you again."

"You're a hard man to find, Lucas Shepard," the General said. "But we caught up to you in the end." The General was close enough to hear what he were saying, and Matt could tell that he was definitely a man. His voice was deep, masculine, and had an authoritative quality about it.

He signaled, and another soldier stepped up, gun raised. With a swift motion, he struck Lucas in the gut with the butt of his weapon. He doubled over in pain, clutching his stomach, while two more soldiers ran up to him and grabbed his arms as a fourth ran up and joined the first in beating him.

"We've got to do something," Matt whispered. He started to get up, but Shade held him back again. _"No!"_ _Reuniclus exclaimed in his

head. "_We can't fight them all off! He's gone!"_

"But-!" He was cut off as Shade muffled him with his paw. He swatted at the dragon, and he caught his arm midair by wrapping his tail around it.

Shade looked him in the eye, a serious expression on his face. "_Stay quiet,"_ he said.

Matt nodded, and Shade released his grip.

"You continue to surprise me, Lucas," the General was saying as the soldiers ceased their beating. "You've spent the last few months running, doing anything to stay free. But here you are, going quietly. Why?"

Lucas shrugged. "I guess I was tired of fighting," he said, his voice glazed with pain.

"Nice try. But I think we both know that isn't the case. There must be something moreâ€|"

Lucas stared at him, saying nothing, only smiling.

"Ohâ€| oh my," said the General. "You've grown soft on me, haven't you?"

"What can I say?" asked Lucas. "I'm tired of getting people I like killed. I had a feeling you had caught up to me again, and decided to finish this."

"Why? Why now?"

"Because I like these people. They don't deserve this. They've been through enough."

The General laughed. "Well, I hope it was worth it. Take him away!"

One of the soldiers who had been beating him raised their gun and bashed him in the head. He slumped down, and if it hadn't been for the soldiers holding him, he would've fallen to the ground completely. The soldiers dragged him back to the truck, threw him in the back, and got in. The doors slammed behind them, and the convoy drove off.

They waited until the trucks were out of sight. When they were gone, they stood up.

"We have to do something!" Matt exclaimed. "We have to help them!"

"There's nothing we can do, Matt!" Sam said. "There's no way we can take on all of them! There's just too many!"

"You took on all of Gunnerville!" Matt protested.

"Yes, but not all at once," Sam explained. "And these guys aren't from Gunnerville. These guys look even worse. Now, we need to figure out where they're going. If they're planning on attacking the rest of

us, we need to know, so we can put together a plan."

"Okay," said Matt. "You lead the way."

Sam was about to mount Ashmore's back, when both of the dragons heard something. They sunk back to the ground, and motioned for the others to do the same.

Matt dropped into his former hiding place and waited. Soon, he heard a familiar-sounding rumble. The convoy was coming back!

The trucks didn't stop this time. Instead, they rumbled back the way they had come. When they were gone, the group stood up again.

"Are they leaving?" asked Matt.

"_ _Maybe,"_ Reuniclus replied.

"There's only one way of knowing," said Sam. "Let's follow them. Come on."

He and Reuniclus got onto Ashmore's back, and Matt climbed onto Shade's. They took off and followed the convoy. They made sure to keep it in sight, but not to get close enough to be seen. Finally, they witnessed the convoy pass over the Lyndrich border.

Ashmore slowed down his flight so that he was flying next to Shade. "Alright!" Sam yelled. "I think it's safe! Let's go find Lily!"

"_ _Hold on! I'll see if I can find her," _said Reuniclus. She was silent for a minute, and then said, "_Land, now! She's here."_

Ashmore and Shade dove to the ground. When they were close enough to begin their landing, they pulled up and glided to the ground.

Before they could dismount, Lily came bursting out of the undergrowth. "_I'll talk to her,"_ said Reuniclus. They talked for a minute, in a language incomprehensible to human ears. Finally, Reuniclus said, "_She saw the convoy leave, but that's it. I told her what happened. She's agreed to go back to the house and discuss it there. I suggest we do the same."_

* * *

><p>So what did you think? Let me know! In the meantime, I'll see you on Wednesday!

34. Chapter 33: The Seven Experiments of Sam

Alright, here's chapter 33! This one's a bit of an oddball, but it's worth it for some background info on things.

Yes, I know this is probably not how genetic engineering works at all. If scientific inaccuracies really bother you, you may want to skip this one.

Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon or HTTYD

* * *

<p>Chapter Thirty-Three

****The Seven Experiments of Sam****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

The mood in the house was tense. Minutes had passed since Matt, Sam, Shade, Ashmore and Reuniclus had left, and they had no idea what was going on. Whatever it was, they all knew it was most likely trouble.

In order to escape the discomfort, Ben had wandered up to Sam's room, and was looking through his bookshelf. Reading was one of his favorite past times, and he was very good at it. It was one of his best defenses against the evil thing called boredom. As he scanned the books, a few different titles stood out. He came across one with no title, and absentmindedly slid it out to look at the cover.

It was an average-sized, leather-bound book. There was no title on the front either. He opened it, and saw that the contents were handwritten on blank sheets of paper. He flipped to the first page and read the passage there.

It identified the book as Sam's journal. It was a record of all of the things he had done in Aperture. As he flipped through the first few pages describing the nature of the lab, he felt a mix of emotions filling him. Wonder that such things as described in the book even existed, and at the same time anger that they had been kept hidden from the world.

And then he came across the experiments. As the journal had said, Sam had been studying genetic engineering for a while, and now he was starting to apply his knowledge

He already knew how the experiments turned out, but he was curious to see how they had been conducted. He turned to the entry of the first experiment and read.

****_Experiment #1_****

****_Subject name: _**_Swampert_**

****_Species: _**_shiny Swampert_**

_Aperture Laboratories has proven to be far more useful than either Ashmore or I could've imagined. The machines here have made it much easier than I ever thought possible to grasp the concept of genetic engineering. It only took me a couple weeks to get the hang of it. I have decided to record the results of all of our experiments with these devices in this journal. _

There was an idea that I had when we first found this place. If they can create Night Furies using these facilities, who's to say that we can't create PokÃ©mon?

_I thought that I would have to study this subject for years before I understood it. However, these machines have made it incredibly

simple. All you need is some DNA. I decided that I wanted my first creation to be a Swampert. Not just any Swampert, but a shiny Swampert. I collected the necessary DNA samples (I recorded all of the specimens in the back of the journal) and began the process._

I won't go into all of the details, but I'll say that it came out perfectly. The Swampert- then a Mudkip- came out exactly how I wanted it to. It was possibly the most wonderful thing I've ever seen.

_For some reason- I think it might have something to do with the nature of his artificial conception- he grew at an alarmingly fast rate. Now, almost two weeks later, he is fully grown. He has proven to be an omnivore, which is good in my opinion, because he can eat almost anything that's actually edible. _

He has proven to be incredibly intelligent. Ashmore has told me they are able to speak to each other, and that he is mentoring him.

I don't really have anything else to say. Well, I do, but if I go any further I'll be here all day. I should stop now while I can.

I will definitely try to recreate this experiment in the future.

Ben could hardly believe it was that easy. But based on the other things that had been down there- the portal gun, for example- it almost seemed plausible.

He also found the matter of Swampert's growth to be interesting. How was it that he started out as a Mudkip, and then grew into a different creature? He supposed he would have to study the same material Sam had to understand.

He would have to congratulate Sam on his accomplishments later. Now, however, he wanted to read about the others. He was especially interested in how the PokÃ©mon had gotten their various abilities, and wondered if that would be detailed at all. He turned to the next page, and started reading the second entry.

****_Experiment #2_****

****_Subject name: _**_Elizabeth_**

****_Species: _**_Scrafty_**

This one was easy. But in no way does that make the results any less special.

For this next experiment, I decided to recreate Elizabeth, my Scrafty. I choose her because Scrafty is remarkably human-like, making it much more familiar of a design. I really only needed two sets of DNA for this; mine and Ashmore's. I gathered some other just to be safe, but they were used minimally at most.

Anyway, I repeated the process I did when I created Swampert, except I did it for a Scrafty instead. Eventually, a Scraggy (the pre-evolution of Scrafty) was born. Of course, I named her Elizabeth.

Do you remember what I said about how quickly Swampert grew? Well, the same thing applied for her. She quickly grew into a Scrafty, eventually shedding her yellow skin for the orange beneath. She then made that shed skin into her outfit. Once again, she proved to be an omnivore, and is just as intelligent as Swampert was.

I think I might do Lily next.

So that's what she is, Ben thought. _So Sam and Ashmore combined their DNAâ€¦ I don't even want to know how that works._ He smiled as a joke came to him. _I didn't know Sam was into that kind of thing. Whatever floats his boat, I guess._

He still didn't know anything about their various abilities. So he turned the page and started reading the next entry.

****_Experiment #3_****

****_Subject name: _**_Lily_**

****_Species: _**_Galvantula_**

This is to me becoming similar to shiny hunting. Whenever I get one, it's good for a while, and I'll always love it, but then I crave more.

This one was interesting, to say the least. I decided to go for Galvantula. It seemed very challenging, because I had to somehow get DNA from an electric fish. Luckily, they keep several animal specimens in the lab, and while they were all dead, their DNA was still usable. Other than that, all I needed was tarantula DNA.

_I mixed the two and influenced the outcome, once again producing a desired result. She started out, of course, as a Joltik. Over a short period of time, she grew into the Galvantula she is now. She grew as quickly as Swampert and Elizabeth did, and is just as intelligent. Unlike them, however, she prefers meat. But she is not entirely carnivorous; she will eat other things when necessary. _

While I was with her yesterday, I noticed something. Since she has the DNA of an electric eel, she can produce electricity, but she seems to be able to produce much more than she should be able to. I am going to look into this, and see if I can discover why. I will also see if Swampert and Elizabeth have similar characteristics.

So she's Spider-Fish? Ben thought, chuckling. _Well, this is getting very interesting._

He wanted to read more. The journal was starting to address the questions he was forming in his head, about the various abilities each of the PokÃ©mon possessed. He saw that the next entry was for Jack. _How the hell did he make her anyway? I need to read this._

****_Experiment #4_****

****_Subject name: _**_Jack_**

****_Species: _**_shiny Chandelure_**

This one was tough. Chandelure is a ghost-type, for one, and it's also supposed to look like a living chandelier. The type that uses actual fire. Well, at least I didn't have to make the fire purple; I made a shiny. This may sound stupid at first, but trust me, it's awesome.

Anyway, I lost many hours of sleep pondering how to go about this one. Finally, I figured out a way. I'll spare you the details- we'd be here forever, and you'd be bored out of your mind. But I did it.

The Litwick (first evolved form of Chandelure) was born, and grew rapidly like the others. Also, like the others, she is very intelligent. Of course, I named her Jack. She really is a wondrous creature. She is alive in every sense of the word, but at the same time she's a ghost. She has ghostly abilities, such as being able to go unseen, or pass through objects.

She also has an unnatural control over fire. She can make it appear by sheer force of will. I allowed this to happen knowingly, as a result of my studies. It seems that the way I made Swampert, Elizabeth and Jack wasn't entirely right, and as a result, their genes are unstable. Sort of. This causes them to have a special mental capacity to influence certain elements, or, in the case of Scrafty, to be much stronger than they should be. For instance, Swampert has displayed an unnatural control over water and the ground (he can create miniature earthquakes around himself).

There is one rather frightening aspect of Jack, however. She doesn't eat in the same way the others do. She doesn't ingest anything; instead, she can create a special fire that absorbs the life force of anything that comes into contact with it. It's awesome and terrifying at the same time.

Well, now that I know how to create ghost types, I think I know what to do next!

This was getting very strange. Ben wasn't even sure if this would've been considered scientifically possible before all of this. In fact, he was almost certain it wouldn't have been. But apparently it _was_ possible.

There were two more left. He turned the page and discovered that the next entry was about Gengar. Of all of the Pok mon, he liked him the most. He began reading.

****_Experiment #5_****

****_Subject name:_**_Gengar_**

****_Species: _**_Gengar_**

This one was fun. Now that I knew how to make a ghost-type, I decided to create the king of all ghost-types: Gengar.

This was the only one I couldn't do the pre-evolution of. No matter how easy this technology is, I could not for the life of me think of a way to create a living cloud of gas that would eventually form together to create a solid being. I just couldn't.

Speaking of which, that reminds me of something I haven't really talked about yet. After being in Aperture, my respect for what was once our government has tanked. I really don't understand why they decided to hide this all from us. They could've changed the world; maybe even for the better. But at the same time, they could've changed the world for the worse, so maybe I'm wrong. Actually, they did.

Anyway, Gengar is awesome. He's great fun to hang around with. He's the most mischievous of my new friends, and honestly I don't think he's entirely right in the head. But that makes him that much more awesome. He grew at about the same rate as the rest, is about as intelligent. Strangely, however, he refuses to eat meat, or anything salty for that matter. He's shown that he has a lot of the same ghostly powers as Jack does, but with one addition: he seems to be able to go into people's minds and control them. He did it to me once and it scared the hell out of me. But he didn't do anything bad. I don't think he would.

I hope.

He can also poison things really easily. He can turn a glass of water into liquid death, basically.

Now that I know how to allow them to have these powers, I think I know what I'm going to try next. A real challenge; psychic-types.

Ben reflected that Gengar seemed like a great creature. He was especially blown away by the revelation that he could possess people. How was such a thing possible? It hurt his head just thinking about it. _How the hell did you do all this, Sam? _he wondered.

Even without process of elimination, Ben would've known who was next. It was Reuniclus. He was very interested in how she was created, mostly because of her telepathy.

****_Experiment #6_****

****_Subject name: _**_Reuniclus_**

****_Species: _**_shiny Reuniclus_**

Before I start, I think I should say that the next experiment I do will be the last one for a while.

Some of the others- especially Ashmore- are becoming concerned. They feel that I am getting too obsessed with this whole thing; and I kind of agree with them. It's been dominating my thoughts, and eating away at me. I need a break.

There's one more I want to try, however.

Now, onto this report. Reuniclus, ah Reuniclus! She is truly an exceptional creature. I've already figured out how to allow my creations to levitate- I forgot to mention that earlier- and how to allow them to control certain elements. But now I have two more challenges.

The first was how to make a single-celled organism that big. Because in the games, that's what Reuniclus was; a single-celled organism. Solution: there is none. It's impossible, not because of the size, but because it just wouldn't work the way I'd want it to. So she's multicellular, but doesn't quite look it.

The other challenge was psychic powers. Aperture had a group of scientists working on such phenomena, and they have proved it to be possible. They've even done quite a bit of research. I've taken that to the next level and used it in creating Reuniclus.

The only things I can tell you that will make sense are that it involves highly unstable genes and a huge amount of brain space. Anyway, the results are astounding. She has incredible telekinetic abilities, and she can use psychic waves to inflict damage. She even uses telepathy.

That's right, telepathy. She is the only one of my friends I can have a straight conversation with. I never realized how much I missed that until now.

Other than that, she's really displayed the same results as everyone else: rapid growth, high intelligence, etc. She also has omnivorish tendencies.

Anyway, I'm going to wrap this up. My next entry will be my last for a while, and to go out with a bang, there's a huge challenge I want to take on.

That was all the PokÃ©mon that he had met so far. As he read, he reflected on what he knew about Sam, and decided it would be just like him to become obsessed like that.

The ending surprised him, however. He had thought there were only six PokÃ©mon. He turned the page, and confirmed that there was indeed a seventh experiment. But there was something different about this one.

****_Experiment #7_****

****_Experiment failed_****

For the first time, I have failed.

I wanted to create a Gigalith. Specifically, a shiny Gigalith. But this brought a huge challenge along with it. Gigalith is a rock PokÃ©mon. So this begs the question, how can you infuse a rock with life?

Answer: you can't. So I did the next best thing; I used DNA from creatures that lived around rocks, and set it so that the creature's skin would be rock-like.

Only something went wrong. Everything was fine up until the end, when the creature was created. I checked for vital signs, but I couldn't find anything. It had been born dead.

_I still don't know what I did wrong, but what I do know was that it had a bad impact on me. The sight of its limp, lifeless body still disturbs me. I don't know why, but it was awful beyond words. I never

want that to happen again._

Until I find out what I did wrong, I will not try these experiments again. And I won't even try to figure it out for a few months. I promised Ashmore, and we have other problems as well. Our relationship with GLaDOS is hitting a rough spot, and until we patch it up, our life is in danger every time we come here.

It's not like I haven't had a good run, though. I now have six amazing new friends, and if I could go back and do it again, I would do it exactly as I did.

There's an end to everything. I don't know if this is the end of this part of my life, but it's at least on hiatus.

A hiatus that hasn't ended yet, Ben thought. He wasn't surprised at how the last experiment had turned out. Sam was bound to fail at some point.

As he was turning the page to read the rest of it, he heard footsteps bounding up the stairs. He turned to see Anthony standing there, out of breath.

"What's up?" asked Ben.

"The sensors went off again," Anthony replied. ", Sam's back, and he's got news."

"Good news or bad news?" Ben asked.

"I don't know," he said. "But I have a feeling that it's bad."

Ben ran downstairs and greeted the returning scouts. The rest of the group had gathered in front of him as he began to explain the situation.

"Who was it?" asked Andrew. "Are we in trouble?"

Sam nodded. "I think we might be. Something bad happened. A small army just rode through the border, and they're definitely not from Gunnerville. These guys look much tougher than Carlton's thugs ever were."

There were several gasps. "Are they here for us?" asked Nick.

Matt shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "We followed them, and they went back across the border, butâ€|"

"But what?" asked Kody.

"They took him."

"Who?"

Matt sighed, and looked to the ground. "Lucas," he announced.

* * *

><p>Alright, on Sunday we get back to the story! In the meantime, let me know what you think!

35. Chapter Thirty-Four: Migration

****Hey guys, I actually got this one in on time! Hope you like it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon or HTTYD****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter Thirty-Four:

****Migration****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

"I'm I the only one who feels like this entire thing is ridiculous?" asked Andrew.

"Would you rather have those soldiers come back and us be unprepared for it?" Jean asked

"No, not that," said Andrew. "I mean, this whole situation. With Sam being the Black Man and having fucking _PokÃ©mon_â€¦ It's just nuts." He looked around, searching for their third companion, but he was nowhere to be seen. "No offense Gengarâ€¦ Wherever the hell you are."

He looked forward, only to have Gengar suddenly flash into sight. Andrew stopped and lost his balance, falling backward. "Jesus Christ!" he yelled. "You scared the shit out of me!"

Jean couldn't help but laugh. Gengar was doing the same.

"Assholes," Andrew muttered as he stood up and brushed the snow and dirt off of his pants.

A whole day had passed since Matt, Sam, Shade, Ashmore and Reuniclus had returned with the news about the soldiers and Lucas's disappearance. They had debated what to do about it, and eventually decided that there wasn't really anything they could do except step up security. The soldiers were long gone, and they had absolutely no way of knowing where they went. As much as they wanted to chase after Lucas and bring him back, they had no idea where he had been taken, and until they could think of some way of finding out, they had to focus on protecting themselves.

They decided to send out patrols of three; two humans and one PokÃ©mon or Night Fury. They were to be equipped with walkies, so that they could communicate with whoever was watching the motion sensors. There would be two patrols at once. The purpose was to allow a faster response to border breaches.

Andrew and Jean were on patrol now. They had been walking for a couple of hours, and so far nothing had happened. They were approaching the Gunnerville border, however, and they had a feeling things would get more eventful there.

For now, however, they were just walking.

"The Gunnerville border is coming up," Andrew pointed out. "Think they'll recognize us?"

"I hope not," Jean replied. "After all the hell we gave them, they'd shoot us dead."

It was true. For the past few months, they had been waging a brutal war with the residents of Gunnerville. They had been heavily outnumbered, but that didn't stop them from fighting against what they believed was wrong.

Because even though they had been four versus a small army, they had managed to make up for their disability. As he remembered all of this, his thoughts drifted back to the last fight they had gotten inâ€¦|

****December 9****th****, 2014****

That night, they had all been sitting around the table in their living room, eating dinner, drinking some beer that Anthony had salvaged, and playing Poker.

They didn't have any money, so they were playing for fun. Instead of chips, they were using pieces of food.

It happened on Anthony's move. He had just wagered ten chips, and had stopped to take a smoke of his joint. He had found some marijuana plants and had planted them in their backyard. He had harvested them daily, and when they began to die in the fall, he had pushed through his grief and made enough joints from the remains to last him the winter- if he used them resourcefully.

Just as he was about to finish, a beeping sound went off upstairs. They looked at each other, dropped all of their cards, and ran towards the noise.

They entered a room with a large control panel in it. About a month ago, there had been a fifth member of their group. His name had been Kevin Drek, and he had been a Junior. He had also been a tech genius. He had made this for them when the war had started.

Later, he had been shot by Carlton's men.

The control panel was powered by solar panels they had found. It was connected to several motion detectors within a two mile radius of their house. If anyone were to enter that radius, it would go off.

"Is it them again?" asked Andrew.

"Would you like to wait around and find out?" asked Kody.

"Not reallyâ€¦|"

"The traps are set, right?" asked Anthony.

"Yeah," Jean replied. He had just been out to check them this morning. There had been several military camps in the area, and they had left behind many different kinds of explosives. They had set up a

maze of them a half mile around their house, to keep out unwanted visitors. It wasn't just explosives either; there were other, homemade traps as well. There was a clear path through, but only they knew where it was.

"Alright, Jean and Anthony, it's your turn," said Andrew. "Me and Kody will stay here and guard the house."

Jean nodded. "Let's go kick some ass," he said.

Anthony put out his joint to save for later. They got into their fighting gear, took their guns, and began the trek towards the source of the disturbance.

For a long time, they crept through the woods, making sure to stay low and quiet. It was a rather mundane task, and Jean found his mind wandering. He began reflecting on their current situation.

What had happened to them- and everyone else as well- had been horrible. But Jean couldn't shake the feeling that he was actually lucky. He was still alive, and despite everything, he almost felt free. Free from people telling him what to do. He could do whatever he wanted to now. The only thing in the way was the war.

For a while, he had been considering leaving. But his friends needed him right now, and he couldn't just abandon them. Not until their fight with Gunnerville was over. And even then, he didn't want to be alone. So as much as he sometimes felt like getting up and walking away, he knew he never would.

Back in reality, they were still walking. After a while, they finally came across something. They were a good distance past the traps, when they heard rustling in the woods ahead of them. The two of them immediately dropped to the ground and waited.

A group of armed men emerged from the trees ahead. They were wearing gas masks and bulletproof vests. Carlton's men.

They made their way past the two boys hugging the ground, giving them a wide enough berth so as to allow them to avoid being seen. Jean grinned to himself as he saw that they were heading straight for the traps.

When they were far enough away, they began following them. They didn't allow themselves to stand up straighter than a crouch, and they moved as silently as possible, staying far enough behind Carlton's men to avoid alerting them. They kept this up for what felt like hours. The cold was beginning to settle in, and they yearned for a warm fire, but they knew they had to keep going.

"Watch out," he heard a man say faintly. "The traps should be coming up soon."

Finally, after what felt like forever, Jean spotted a familiar landmark ahead. A single tally carved into a tree. These were the signs they had left for themselves, signaling that the traps were about to begin.

He grinned to himself.

The men up ahead were moving more cautiously than ever before. Jean realized this, but knew it was only a matter of time before they fell into a trap.

"Stop!" someone shouted. Everyone immediately froze.

"Sarge, look at this," the man said. Jean craned his neck and saw that they were in front of a trip wire. He then recognized this area. He had set this trap himself.

"What?" a man in the back asked. He walked around the group of men to the left

Only to step on the pitfall. The ground collapsed beneath him as he plunged into the pit. A shriek of agony filled the night air as he was impaled on the spikes below.

"Sarge!" someone yelled. The men immediately backed up, desperate to get out of the traps. Not all of them were as lucky.

The one near the tripwire took a step back, but lost his footing. He fell backward, and his foot caught the tripwire in front of him. A massive explosion ripped through the night, and at least three of the men were caught in it.

Jean did a quick headcount. There were six left. One of them lost their balance and fell into the pitfall with the sergeant. Another walked into the last trap. Their foot stepped inside a coil of rope hidden under the earth. At his touch, the trap was activated, and the rope snapped around his leg and dragged him up into the trees. In his astonishment, he dropped his gun.

There were only four left, and they had gotten away from the traps. But their backs were against Jean and Anthony, making it the perfect time to strike.

Jean looked at Anthony and motioned to fire. Anthony seemed to agree, and they stood up, aimed for the back of the soldiers' heads, and fired.

Blood rained from the air as two of the soldiers fell. The other two whirled around to aim, but were stricken down as the stream of bullets took them out.

The entire squad had been wiped out, except for the soldier that had been caught in the rope. Jean saw that he was still struggling to get down, and walked up to him.

"Please," he pleaded. "Let me go. I surrender!"

"Let's kill him," said Anthony.

The soldier started panicking. "No, please! I beg you!"

Jean disagreed. While it was true that as long as he lived, the soldier posed a threat, but if they killed him, the true story of what happened would never make it back to Gunnerville.

"No," said Jean. "I have a better idea."

"What?"

"Let's let him go. Take all of his weapons and send him back to Gunnerville. Let him tell them what happened here, and that we aren't people to mess with."

Anthony considered. "Fine," he said. "Let's just get it over with."

"Thank you," the soldier said. "Thank you so much."

"Shut up," Jean ordered. He pulled out his knife and cut the rope, letting the soldier fall to the ground. "Get up," he ordered. He and Anthony yanked him to his feet and held his gun to his head.

"Your weapons," said Anthony. "Give them to me."

The soldier reached into his pocket, pulled out his knife, and gave it to Anthony.

"My pistol fell out," he added.

After that, Anthony frisked him. Finding nothing, he yanked off his mask and vest to make sure he wasn't concealing anything there. "He's clear," he said.

Jean shoved him in the direction of Gunnerville. "Go straight that way, and _nowhere _else. If you don't leave, we'll know."

The soldier, who had short brown hair and green eyes, nodded hastily and ran off.

"Hopefully they'll think twice before coming here again," he said.

They gathered all the bodies and threw them into the pit, where the sergeant and his fellow soldiers had bled to death, if they hadn't died immediately. They gathered all signs that a fight had even taken place and threw it in there, except for the ammo. They took the ammo with them.

They went home after that. The next morning, they came back with shovels and filled in the hole.

Gunnerville would never get a chance to attack them again. In a way, they won the war.

****Present Day****

They had reached the Gunnerville border, and the wall was starting to come into view. Andrew was getting nervous. Sam had warned them about the wall.

"Be very, very careful," he had said. "Especially along the section I burnt down. They don't like to go outside the wall on this border, out of fear of what I'll do to them, but if you get their attentionâ€¦ They'll shoot first, and ask questions later. Especially if they think you had anything to do with what happened to their friends who came here."

That had reminded Andrew of something he had been wondering. Despite everything, he couldn't get his mind around the fact that Sam had never seemed to be someone who would execute another human. And yet, the soldiers that had come here had never been heard from again.

So he had asked. "What did you do to those soldiers?"

"Well," said Sam. "I didn't kill them. But I made sure they were never heard from again. I blindfolded them and took them out of the wall- a different spot every time. And it wasn't always into Massachusetts. I've taken them to Vermont, Maine; once I even took them to Canada.

"Anyway, I left them there, and told them that if they ever came back, I would find out, and I would kill them."

"Did any come back?"

Sam shrugged. "I don't know, I can't protect the entire state myself! It's hard enough protecting Lyndrich. I have no idea if they came back, but the point was to try and scare them out of it."

They had been warned to be careful. And they were careful. They made sure to stay as far away as they could, at the same time keeping the wall in sight. When they first saw it, Andrew gaped. It was a thick, massive wooden structure. He wondered how much time and resources it took, and how they were obtained.

"I can't believe they were so successful," he said.

"That's the sad part," said Jean.

They walked along it for several minutes, until finally the burnt part came into view.

The wall turned a charred black. And then it crumbled away; for as far as they could see, it was nothing but rubble.

"Nice going Sam," said Jean. Gengar appeared behind them suddenly and observed it. His appearance startled Andrew, and he smiled mischievously. "Stop doing that!" Andrew complained.

"Were you a part of that?" Jean asked the ghost.

Gengar shook his head regretfully.

It looked as if they had been trying to rebuild it. A lot of the rubble had been cleared away, and Andrew thought he could see the charred remains of wires leading along it. He pointed them out. "Do you see those wires?" he asked.

Jean squinted. "Yeah," he said.

"What are they? Sensors or something?"

"Maybe," Jean replied. "It would explain why nobody got away with doing that until now. Everyone was distracted that night, from what I hear."

Behind them, Gengar had slapped his forehead in exasperation. "Hey!"

Andrew exclaimed. "Not everyone is as informed as you!"

Gengar shook his head, and pushed them to the ground. He glared at them, pointed past the wall, and then disappeared.

Andrew remembered the warning Sam had given them. "Right," he whispered. "Sorry."

They began to creep along, keeping low, but not quite crawling. Andrew started feeling like something was wrong. If the wall was damaged, leaving the town vulnerable, then why wasn't there anybody guarding it?

A few minutes later, they heard something that made them freeze in place.

Gunshots.

It took him a second to realize they weren't in any danger. The gunshots were far off.

"Is this normal?" Andrew whispered. He felt weird. He was trying to talk to Gengar, but there was no telling where the ghost was.

Gengar materialized- but not in a way as to scare him. The ghost was frowning. Something was wrong.

He motioned for them to stay put, and then floated towards the gap in the wall. Slowly, he began to turn invisible.

When he was gone, Andrew turned to Jean in confusion. "What's going on?" he asked.

Jean shrugged. "I don't know."

They waited there for a while. Andrew's thoughts began to drift, and he too began remembering things. He remembered the first time they had come face to face with the men of Gunnerville.

Next to Z-Day, it was one of the worst days of his life. That day, he felt as if part of himself had died.

****October 29****th****, 2014****

Before that day, things were different.

First of all, Gunnerville was different. They had been busy building their wall, and occasionally ransacking neighborhoods. They had blocked off passage between certain towns, but they had never really bothered the group in Norbury.

But when they finished their wall, they became more ambitious. Suddenly, they wanted more. And they intended to have it.

They set their sights on Norbury because it would allow the biggest possible expansion. The town between them, Hampstead, was all but theirs, and Norbury was almost empty. And it was right near the border with Massachusetts and the Wall. That would make it much easier to defend.

Before that day, Andrew found himself able to tolerate this new world much more easily. It was a terrifying world, where any slip up meant death, and he had seen and been through horrible things. His whole family had died. But he had made it through, and he was with his friends, and that had to mean something.

But he still had a hard time sleeping at night. And before it got any better, it was going to get worse.

Much worse.

They came in the middle of the day. Kody and Anthony had just gotten back from scavenging, and had joined in the conversation Andrew, Jean and Kevin (who was still alive) had started. In the months that had passed since Z-Day, they had been forced to give up many of their old past times in exchange for new, old-fashioned ones. Instead of playing video games, they played cards and drinking games (when they had alcohol). Instead of texting, they talked.

At that point, they had been staying in a different house, on a much more crowded street. They had not fully cleared out the houses around them, and some of them were still ripe for scavenging.

And that was what the soldiers were doing that day. They were scavenging the houses up the street from their house. If it hadn't been for the zombies out that day, they wouldn't have had any warning until it was too late.

One minute, everything was fine. The next, gunshots echoed down the street, alerting them to the danger at hand.

"Someone's out there," said Anthony.

"Let's go and see who," Kody suggested.

"Wait," Kevin requested. He got up, and his height made itself apparent. Kevin was very tall, towering over the others, and despite being a nerdy tech genius, he was also pretty good looking. He was African-American, with short, black hair and brown eyes. He was very skinny.

He walked over to the window and looked down the street. For a while, he stood there, watching. And then he turned back to the others.

"I have a bad feeling about this," he said. "They don't look very friendly. They look like trouble."

"What should we do?" asked Andrew.

"Let's hide," Jean suggested. "If they come in, we'll watch them. If they're good, we'll come out. And if they're bad, we won't."

"What if they're bad and they find us?" asked Anthony.

"Then the rest of us open fire," Jean answered.

They waited until the group of people was a little closer, and then they chose their hiding spots. Andrew chose a closet upstairs. He sat there, breathing heavily, clutching his gun. He was nervous. Very nervous.

He prayed that it wouldn't come to violence. He had never shot another human before, and didn't want to. He wasn't sure if he could, even if someone's life depended on it.

He heard someone trying to open the front door, and voices to go along with it. They were here.

Then, there was a loud bang as the door was kicked open. Andrew heard footsteps downstairs, and the sound of drawers and cupboards opening.

"It looks like someone was here recently," he heard one of them say.

"Maybe they're still here," another suggested.

"Search the house!" a third one ordered. Andrew held his breath as footsteps scattered throughout the first floor, opening doors and checking every nook and cranny.

They're going to find one of us he thought.

Suddenly, one of them yelled, "Got one!" There was the sound of a scuffle, and he heard Kody yell, "No! Fuck you!"

"Found another!" someone yelled. There was more struggling, and Jean yelled this time.

After a short time, the struggling stopped. He heard the men began interrogating the two of them.

"How many of you are there?" he heard someone demand.

"Just the two of us," said Jean.

He knew that he had to help them. Slowly, he crept out of his closet and out of the room, into the hallway leading to the staircase. He looked out first, to make sure it was clear, and saw Anthony creeping out of another room as well.

"Come on," he whispered. "We've got to help them."

Andrew nodded. Downstairs, things were getting worse. They had found Kevin, and had dragged him with the others.

"We know you're lying!" someone said. There was a thumping noise, and Andrew guessed that one of his friends had been hit. "How many are there?!"

They reached the bottom of the stairs and peered around the corner into the living room. About six men dressed in bulletproof vests and gas masks were in there. Three were holding down Kody, Jean and Kevin, one was standing in front of Kody interrogating him, and the other two were keeping watch. Jean looked angry, Kevin looked frightened, and Kody's face was clouded with pain. A black eye was forming on the left side of his face.

"What are we going to do?" Andrew whispered to Anthony.

"Shoot 'em," Anthony replied. "Get the ones holding them down first."

Andrew shook his head. He knew what he had to do, but he didn't think he could shoot another human being.

"I don't think I can do it," he said.

"Don't be a pussy," Anthony replied. "It's them or us. Your choice."

Andrew took a deep breath, and nodded. "Okay," he said.

"Now, on three. One! Two! Three!"

They jumped out from the staircase and opened fire. Andrew made sure to aim for the men holding down his friends first. He didn't let himself think about what he was doing. He just fired.

He was a little worried that he would hit his friends, but months spent shooting zombies had sharpened his aiming skills, and allowed him to hit only the men holding them. Many of his bullets hit their vests, but he got a few lucky shots in the head. The gas masks were, to put it bluntly, not very useful face protection at all. They dropped quickly.

By the time the men had realized what was happening, two of their men were dead. One of Anthony's bullets pierced a third one's mask and killed him. Only three were left.

Freed, their friends ran out of the room to go for their guns. The remaining men shot at Andrew and Anthony, forcing them to duck behind the wall.

The bullets flew, passing uncomfortably close to Andrew's body. They waited for a break in the fire, and then leaned out to shoot back.

They managed to take out one of the soldiers, but the other two started firing again. Andrew managed to duck behind the wall in time, but Anthony wasn't so lucky.

Blood flew, and the boy screamed in pain. Andrew looked to see him clutching his arm, blood pumping from beneath his hand.

"Fucking dick!" he cursed. The bullets were starting to come through the wall, but they hadn't found the boys yet. "We need to get upstairs!" Andrew yelled.

Anthony struggled to his feet, and the two of them ran up the stairs. There they stopped, waiting for the men to follow.

But they never did. At that moment, more gunshots added their thunder to the storm. There was a few more seconds of it, and then it stopped completely.

They waited, until they got confirmation of what they were praying for. They had won.

Kevin's face appeared at the bottom of the stairs. "You guys can come

down," he said.

Andrew and Anthony slowly walked down the stairs. The living room was a mess. Bullet holes riddled the walls, and the bodies and blood were strewn across the floor. As the heat of battle was dying down, Andrew became horrified at what he had done. He had killed people. They were bad people, but people all the same.

"We should leave," Jean suggested. "If they have any friends, they'll be coming after them. We'll want to be long gone when that happens."

Nobody had any argument. They gathered what they could carry and left, leaving the house and the bodies behind.

Unbeknownst to them at the time, their actions had started a war. A war that would last three months, and one that would take its toll on all of them.

****Present day****

Gengar floated through the air, watching the events below him; or rather, the absence of events.

This wasn't the first time he had gone into Gunnerville like this. Due to their abilities to levitate and become invisible, he and Jack had often come to spy on the town. But never had either of them seen anything like this.

His normally mischievous mood was completely absent. Something was up, and he knew it. He knew it from the moment he heard the gunshots. Yes, gunfire in Gunnerville wasn't out of the ordinary, but it seemed much more concentrated than normal this time. There was nobody on the border, which wasn't out of the ordinary either, but as he floated closer to the center, there was still nobody. There were usually at least a few soldiers wandering around.

He kept going, trying to find the source of the gunfire. He was starting to reach the center of town, and had sped up his flight so that he could finish his task and get back to the humans faster. He was starting to see soldiers about, and they were all walking in the same direction.

_Something's definitely going on, _he thought. He continued to float in the same direction, until he saw it.

In a field up ahead, all the soldiers were gathered. There were several targets on the field, and they were taking turns shooting at them. On the other side, they were running some sort of obstacle course.

_What is this, some sort of training day? _He thought. And then, as he got closer, he noticed something else. On the other side of the field, there were several armored trucks, with soldiers around them wearing black armor the likes of which Gengar had never seen. As he got even closer, he saw that they were among the other soldiers as well, overseeing their progress. When each of them was done with the activities, a soldier would say something to them, and they would board one of the trucks.

As he floated even closer, he saw someone on the edge of the field. Someone who might be able to give him answers: Chris Maverick.

Suddenly, Gengar realized how serious this might be. He had observed Maverick, and decided that he would be a much stronger leader than Carlton- and just as nasty. If he was in power, than things might get much worse for all of them.

Maverick was talking to one of the strange soldiers. Gengar floated closer, and began to listen in on their conversation.

"Where we keep our training facility," said the soldier. "How long they spend there will be determined by how well they do here."

"I thought your boss said it would be one month," said Maverick.

"That's the average," said the soldier. "It could be more or less, depending."

"So, General," said Maverick, changing the subject. "You said you're taking us to your training facility. Is that separate from your HQ?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," the General replied. "Doc would have my head. Literally."

"So does he run the show?" asked Maverick. "Is he your commander?"

The General shook his head. "No. He's higher than I am, but there's someone else even he answers to. I don't know who he is, but the Doctor is his personal representative. He oversees everything we do, and makes sure it's done exactly as the Boss wants it. And then he reports back."

Gengar's head was spinning. He didn't understand what was going on, but he knew had to keep listening. From what Reuniclus and Ashmore had told him, these must have been the soldiers that had kidnapped Lucas. He had a feeling that Lucas was here somewhere, and that if he kept listening, he would find out where. Maybe he could bust him out.

"Your organization sounds like it loves secrets," Maverick observed.

"Oh, you don't know the half of it," said the General.

Maverick looked as if he wanted to say something else, but then a walkie he was carrying on his belt went off. He sighed in exasperation, and then picked it up. "What?" he asked.

"Sir! We found two people crawling around the border where the Black Man burned down the gate. What should we do with them?"

Gengar felt a surge of frustration. "Those idiots!" He thought. "How'd they get caught?"

The expression on Maverick's face had changed from one of annoyance to one of urgency. "Keep them right where they are," he ordered. "I'm on my way."

He put away his walkie and turned to the General. "I have to go," he said.

"I'll come with you," the General offered.

That was enough for Gengar. He immediately began flying back where he had come from. He had to save the others.

As he jetted through the air, he began to think of a plan. It was a messy one, but it would have to do.

Several minutes later, he arrived at the scene. He was relieved to see that he had made it before Maverick and the General. But he had to act quickly. They would be here soon.

There were three soldiers in total, standing just inside the ruins of the gate. All of them were Gunnerville soldiers. Two of them were holding guns to Andrew and Jean, who were standing as still as they could, looking frightened. The third was keeping watch.

Gengar didn't even hesitate. He chose the soldier who was keeping watch, and dived into his head. His body disassembled into a cloud of colorless vapor that entered the man's body through his nostrils and mouth.

He felt the man stiffen up as he recognized the foreign presence. There was resistance, but Gengar easily fought it off. He was used to this now, and could do it easily to almost anyone or anything. Curiously, the only one that he had ever struggled with was the crazy one. He didn't know why, but there was something special about him. He put up a stronger fight than Gengar had believed possible from a human.

He pushed the man's conscious into a corner, and felt himself gain control over the body. As always, there was a brief moment of disorientation as he was suddenly looking through the eyes of someone else, but he got over it.

He moved his new body, testing it. He flexed the arms and legs, turned the head, and wiggled the fingers. Then, when he was ready, he decided it was time.

"Hey, are you okay?" the soldier who was guarding Jean asked.

Gengar turned the man's head to stare at the soldier. "Yes," he said. "I can honestly say I've never been better."

He raised the gun and shot him in the head.

Blood splashed onto the ground behind him, and the soldier fell to his knees, and then on his face.

"What the fuck?" the other soldier yelled. He raised his gun to shoot, but Gengar was quicker. He shot him square in the face, and he fell backwards.

Andrew and Jean were staring at him in astonishment. "What are you waiting for?" he asked. "Get out of here!"

"Gengar?" asked Jean. "Is that you?"

"Of course it is. Now run! I'll be right behind you!"

They turned and ran back into the woods. Gengar turned away from them and waited. He wished he could follow them back, but there was something he needed to do first.

He had a chance to clean up the mess they had made. If they found out that they had been responsible for this, things would escalate. But if he could turn the blame onto someone elseâ€¦

The car arrived. It parked in front of him, and Maverick and the General got out.

"What the fuck happened here?" Maverick demanded. "Where did they go?"

Gengar slowly and calmly gripped his gun. "Where did who go?" he asked, trying his best to feign insanity.

He brought his gun up to Carlton. As he expected, they returned the gesture. He made sure to allow them to do it faster.

They didn't even blink when they shot him. One minute his body was whole, the next it was riddled with bullet holes. As he felt the body die, he knew it was time to leave.

He detached himself from the body, and felt the vapors exit. They formed into an invisible cloud above it, and reassembled into his true form.

Below him, the man's body dropped like a stone. As Maverick and the General examined it, he retreated back into Lyndrich. By the time they left, he was long gone.

* * *

><p>So, let me know what you think. In the meantime, I'll see you again on Sunday!

36. C35: Zombies, Dragons and Santa Clause

****Alright guys, sorry for the delay. I was CRAZY busy on Wednesday.****

****I also have another announcement: due to time constraints, I'm unfortunately going to have to go back to only one chapter a week. I'll be putting up a chapter every Wednesday but only Wednesday from now on. I'm truly sorry, but that's the way it has to be.****

****Anyway, here's the new chapter. Hope you like it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

<p>Chapter Thirty-Five:

****Zombies, Dragons and Santa Clause****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

When Gengar returned to the house, everyone was questioning him.

Andrew and Jean had radioed in to Sam, reporting what had happened. While Gengar had made it back first, everybody had already heard his story. Still, he told his side to Reuniclus, and she translated it to the humans. Then, while they were discussing the problem, the PokÃ©mon were gathered in the other room. Neither Shade nor Ashmore were with them; ever since a hunting trip they had gone on the previous night they had gone off doing God knew what.

"Just give me a chance," Gengar was pleading. "I know they have Lucas there somewhere. If I can find him, I can get him out."

"Are you insane?" asked Lily.

"A little," Gengar replied.

"Lily's right, Gengar," said Jack. "There are way too many soldiers there. You're going to get Lucas killed."

"From what I hear, Lucas is fully capable in a fight," Gengar reasoned.

"Then how'd he get where he is in the first place, hmm?" asked Lily.

Gengar glared at her in irritation. "He gave himself up," he explained.

"Fine, let's forget Lucas," said Swampert. "What about you, Gengar? You're going to get yourself killed. I know how you fight, and you'd be putting yourself right in the open."

Gengar stared at him in contempt. "I'm a ghost," he said. "They can't kill me!"

Elizabeth had been sitting in the corner listening the whole time. And to tell the truth, Gengar was starting to piss her off. It was really nothing new; the two of them bickered all the time. Deep down, they cared for each other, but they had a weird way of showing it.

She decided she was fed up with it. "Okay," she said. "I've had it with this."

She stood up, and all eyes in the room were on her. "If you had any ounce of sense in you, you'd see that what you're talking about is a suicide mission!" Gengar opened his mouth to argue, but Elizabeth interrupted him. "Don't, say, anything! I don't care. Have you forgotten the time you almost died fighting them? You had us all worried sick, and now you think you can just run off and do

something twenty times more dangerous?

"You're not invincible, Gengar! You may have the powers of a ghost, but you're just as alive as everyone else here! Death is just as final and just as permanent for you as it is for the rest of us!"

She paused for a moment, and shook her head. "Honestly, Gengar. Sometimes I think you _want _to get yourself killed."

She turned and left the room in a storm.

Gengar turned to the others, who were all staring at him accusingly. "You're all getting it later," he said. "I'm gonna scare the hell out of every last one of you."

At that, he disappeared.

Out in the living room, Sam had just finished telling the humans what Gengar had seen. They spent a while debating what to do about it, and they eventually came to the conclusion that they couldn't do anything. The only thing they could do was gather information and try to rescue him at some point, all while hoping the soldiers didn't invade them.

None of them wanted it to be that way, but they had no other choice. If they tried to take on an army that size, even without the help of Gunnerville, which they apparently now had, they would be killed in minutes; even the dragons.

Eventually, the group dispersed to talk amongst themselves. Trent took the opportunity to approach Sam.

He had found it in him to forgive the boy for what he had done. But he still needed something from him.

"Sam," he said. "Can we talk?"

"Sure," Sam answered.

"I meanâ€¦ in private?"

"Oh, okay. Sure, follow me."

He led Trent into through a living room, and into a bedroom. He shut the door behind them, and turned to face him. "What's up?" he asked.

"I know I'm being pushy," he began. "But I need to know what you're going to do about the flash drive."

Sam sighed. "Look," he said. "It could be anywhere in Lyndrich. I can look for it, but there's a very low chance that we'll actually find it."

"Couldn't you retrace your steps or something?" asked Trent. "You know, remember the last time you saw it?"

"I can try," Sam said, exasperation in his voice. "But I don't know if it'll work. Look, do you know what day it is?"

Trent shook his head. "I haven't been keeping count. I really don't see the point of doing that anymore."

"Well, I have, and it's Christmas Eve."

Trent looked surprised. "Oh," he said. "I didn't realize that."

"Yeah, I was planning a surprise feast for everyone with Swampert tomorrow. Ashmore was supposed to be in on it too, but he's run off somewhere with Shade. Speaking of which, have you seen either of them?"

"No," Trent replied, shaking his head. "Sorry."

"It's okay. Anyway, it's going to take me a while to think of somewhere to look," Sam explained. "I'd really like tomorrow to have some shred of normalcy, or at the very least I'd like to forget all of these bad things that have been happening, at least for a little bit. I'll try to think about where the flash drive might be, but I'd really appreciate it if you'd give me a couple days to do it."

Trent considered. The longer they took, the more likely it would never turn up. Yet he realized that the more he argued, the less Sam would want to help. "Okay," he agreed.

"What's in that thing that's so important, anyway?" asked Sam.

Trent thought for a moment, trying to decide how to explain it to him. "You know how the zombie pathogen escaped from those top-secret government labs?" he asked.

"Yeah, what about it?" Sam asked.

Trent leaned forward. "Well what if I told you they had a plan, in case the pathogen escaped and the country was overrun? What if I told you that somewhere here in New Hampshire is a machine that will wipe out all the zombies? What would you say to that?"

Sam's eyes widened. "Are you saying that's what's in the flash drive?" he asked.

"No," he said. "But all the information I know about it is in there. Without it, I'm lost."

Sam sat down on the bed, realizing what he had done. "Oh my God" He struggled to find the words. "I'm sorry I had no idea"

"I don't blame you," Trent replied. "I mean, who would've guessed the government would actually do something smart?"

Despite himself, Sam gave him a chuckle.

"Just try for me, okay?"

Sam nodded. "I will."

Suddenly, Trent remembered something. Something GLaDOS had said to him.

"When we were stuck in Aperture- I'm still mad at you for that, by the way- we asked GLaDOS if she knew where that thing is."

Sam laughed. "Yeah, how'd that go?" he asked.

"Actually, she said something. She said it was called the Machine, and that 'the One Who Came Before' knew where it was. I assumed that was you. _Do_ you know anything?"

Sam frowned, and shook his head. "No," he said. "I have absolutely no idea where it is. I'm sorry."

That night, just as the group was about to break up until morning, the dragons came back.

The group had many questions for them, but they didn't give any answers. Eventually, they split up, and Matt and Shade went home.

As the night grew darker, Shade remained awake. He was waiting for something, and it wasn't sleep.

Finally, it came well past midnight. There was a tapping on the window, and Shade sat up. He checked to see if Matt was awake. He wasn't.

Slowly and quietly, he stood up and climbed off of the bed. Being careful not to wake Matt, he padded towards the door.

Carefully pinching the doorknob between two of his claws, he slowly rotated it, and opened the door.

The dragon squeezed through the threshold and into the hallway, closing the door behind him with his tail. He made his way to the stairwell and down the stairs, being careful not to make noise and wake anybody. When he reached the bottom, he turned to the door.

This one would be trickier. There were two, and the first was locked. He pinched the lock mechanism between two of his claws and rotated it to the left, unlocking it. Then, he opened the door the same way he opened the last one.

The next door was much easier. Instead of a knob, it was a handle. He pressed his paw against it and it opened.

As he squeezed out into the front yard, he saw Ashmore waiting for him. He nodded in greeting as he wrapped his tail around the door and pulled it shut.

Ashmore nodded back, and the two of them took flight. They stayed close to each other as their wings beat the night air.

"Merry Christmas, Ashmore," Shade said.

"Merry Christmas," Ashmore returned.

"There's something I've been wanting to ask you," said Ashmore. "What was it like for you the first time?"

"What was what like?" Shade replied in confusion.

"Flying."

"Oh," Shade thought back to his first flight. After Ashmore had left him, he had engaged in a quick duel with the guards who had been following them. A few breaths of fire had been enough to incapacitate them while he ran.

More guards had arrived by then, and Shade had to continuously dodge them. It took him several minutes to make his way out, and by the time he did, Ashmore was long gone.

The guards were hot on his tail at that point, and he saw no other way out than to fly. So he had sped up- and let instinct take care of the rest.

"It wasâ€¦ beautiful," he recalled. And it had been. Once he had gotten out of range of the guards, the rest followed. It all came to him at once. The new sights, the new smells, the feeling of soaring high above the world, until the humans that had made his life a living hell were nothing but ants to him. And the feeling of his wings beating and churning the air for the first time, and the wind gliding across his face and down his body and whistling through his scales, and he was free and _flying_-

"It was one of the happiest moments of my life," he added.

Ashmore nodded. "I know what you mean," he agreed.

They spotted their landmark, a small clearing in the forest where they had burned a black circle into the grass, and began their descent. When they were safely on the ground, Ashmore led the way into the forest.

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you," Ashmore announced. "How do you feel about Lily?"

Shade was confused. "She's nice," he replied. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, does sheâ€¦ you knowâ€¦ creep you out a little?"

In fact, she did. When they first met, Shade thought she had been fine, but the longer he got to know her, the more she made him feel on edge. He couldn't put his claw on it, but there was something just _wrong_ about her.

Shade nodded. "I know what you mean. But I don't understand _why_."

"Right? I've known her longer than you have, and I _know_ _she's_ good, but something about her just creeps me out. I 'asked' Sam about it, and he just laughed and said something about eel DNA."

"What the hell is an eel?" asked Shade.

"They're nasty little buggers," Ashmore explained. "They're like snakes, except much slimier and with fins. And they live in water and they're justâ€¦ _ugh_." The dragon shuddered.

Shade formed an image in his mind of an eel, and shuddered as well. He couldn't explain it, but the creature he imagined was just _horrible_.

"Alright, we're here," Ashmore said, changing the subject.

Shade looked ahead and saw the object they had come for. They had discovered it on a hunting trip the night before, and had spent the entire day deciding what to do with it. "Do you remember the plan?" he asked.

Ashmore nodded. "You bet," he said. Together, the two of them latched onto it with their claws, spread their wings, and flew off.

Matt was dreaming.

He was in the city again. This time, he started off in a building. For some reason, he felt compelled to look out the window. When he did so, he gasped.

The streets in the city below were filled with zombies. In fact, there was not a single visible patch of ground. Somehow, even worse, not a single one of them was moving. They were all looking up and staring straight at _him_.

As Matt observed the horde, he saw that he knew many of them. They were all the people who had died. His parents, his sister, the rest of his family, his neighbors, his friends, anyone who he had known who was dead, even those who had been his enemies. He saw Carlton down there, looking at him as well, along with several of his soldiers

And then, _him_.

_Why? _He thought. _Why does this memory keep haunting me?_

Then, there was a knock on the door. He turned around, and fear crept up his back. Slowly, he walked over to the door and reached out to it.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

There was no response; only another knock on the door.

He grasped the doorknob and slowly gave it a turn. He opened it a crack, and peered out to see who it was.

It was Elizabeth

He opened the door and sighed in relief. "Oh, it's you," he said. "You scared me."

And then, she started to change before his eyes. Her skin began to bubble, and her features became less pronounced. This continued until she was nothing but a yellow and orange blob.

And then the color began to change. Black spread across the shifting mass. Matt looked on in horror as the blob began to take the shape of a dark figure much taller than he was.

As he watched, the figure began to take on a familiar shape. Finally, its mass stopped shifting, and it took on a solid form.

The figure was tall and thin, and was encased entirely in a black cloak. The shadow cast by the hood seemed to cover its face, yet as Matt looked into the void, it was almost as if he didn't _have _a face.

"You again," Matt said; for he remembered the stranger. They had been there, watching, when Brian had gotten bit. They had seen the whole thing, but had only watched. "Who are you?"

He heard laughter- male laughter. The figure reached up his hands, gloved in black cloth, and pushed his hood back, revealing a face.

His face.

"What? How?" asked Matt.

He walked towards the frightened teen, and raised his fists. "You killed me," he said.

"No! I didn't mean to!" Matt protested. "I'm sorry!"

He swung his fist at Matt, and he fell to the ground. "It's too late for that," he said. He knelt over the boy and kept swinging. The blows descended on Matt's face, and he started screaming. But there was something strange about the blows. They didn't hurt at all. It didn't feel like he was hitting him that hard. In fact, they didn't even feel like fists. They felt like-

He opened his eyes and sat up, gasping heavily.

It took him a few seconds to realize he was staring right into Shade's face. The dragon had been nudging him awake.

The Night Fury had concern in his eyes. He could tell something was wrong. _Are you okay? _ He seemed to ask.

Matt took a couple of deep breaths, and nodded. "It was just a bad dream," he said.

At that, Shade's mood turned infinitely better. He hopped off of the bed excitedly and ran for the open door, tail swishing back and forth. He looked back at Matt before he squeezed through.

"What're you all excited about?" he asked, grinning. His dream was already beginning to fade. "And how the hell did you get the door open?"

He got out from under the covers, slipped on his shoes, and followed him. Because of the cold, he had slept in his clothes, sweatshirt and all. He had just washed them the previous day, and since he only had two pairs (all of his old clothes were too big for him after all of the weight he had lost), he would have to wear them again.

He walked out into the hallway and saw Shade bound down the stairs, full of energy. "Whoa, be careful there," he said as he knocked a picture off of the wall. He picked up the picture to hang it back up,

and as he did so he got a good look at it.

It was of him with his family.

The picture brought back memories of Before. They brought with them an explosion of emotions. As he hung it back up, a tear rolled down his cheek.

Shade noticed this, and came up behind him. He pressed himself against his human friend and gave him a comforting warble.

"Thanks," he said. He gave his dragon friend a hug, and they kept going.

Shade led him into the kitchen, calmly this time. When they entered, Matt stopped and stared in amazement.

The kitchen was composed of two areas; a cooking area and an eating area. From the hallway entering it, the area on the left was the cooking area. In the lower left-hand corner were two archways, the left one leading into the family room and the bottom one leading into the living room. In between where Matt was standing and that corner was a large, black refrigerator, a cupboard and a pantry. To the right of the entrance to the family room was a small counter about a foot long with cupboards above and below it. Next to that was a stove and an oven, with a microwave and another cupboard on top. Then, there was another counter, exactly like the first, that traveled to the next corner, turned, and kept going until it reached the sink. Above the sink was a window looking into his backyard. Next to that were more counters and cupboards, with the dishwasher below the counter right next to the sink. After the dishwasher, the counter branched off of the wall and became a thick, peninsula-like table.

The eating area was much simpler. Immediately to Matt's left was the door that led into the basement, followed by the archway into the dining room that marked the lower right corner. To the right was the door that led to a bathroom. Then, there was a glass slider door across the room from him that led onto his screened-in back porch. In between the two was a shelf that held a radio, some baskets, and other things. In the middle was a round, wooden table with four chairs around it and a rotating platform in the center that held things such as the napkins, condiments, and utensils during mealtimes.

The counter in the center had been cleared off, with everything pushed to the side. In the center of the table was an offering of sorts; a large buck, freshly killed, had been placed in the center. Its blood had begun to pool onto the counter, but that could be cleaned up afterwards.

"Did you catch this for us?" he asked.

Shade nodded proudly.

Matt walked up to it in wonder, squeezing around the dragon which took up almost all the space in the room. The buck was huge; one of the biggest he had ever seen. "It's the middle of winter!" He exclaimed. "How'd you find one this big? Shade, this is enough to feed us for a week at least!" he looked at the dragon, who was

grinning at his work. "Well, maybe not with you around. But still!"

He went to remove the buck from the table. "What's the occasion, anyway?" he asked. And then he saw it.

Right in front of the buck was a message written in the deer's blood. One look told him it was Shade's writing. He had taught the dragon how to write with his claws. However, seeing as they weren't made for writing, the scrawl on the table was hard to read, and almost looked like a foreign language. In fact, it was almost as bad as Ben's handwriting.

The message read "_Merry Christmas._"

Matt was speechless. With all that had happened, he had completely forgotten the upcoming holiday. An assault of feelings barraged his mind. He had told Shade about Christmas before; had shared all of his fondest memories of the wonderful holiday. But if _he _had forgotten itâ€|

"How did you know?" he asked.

Shade just grinned at him. The answer came to Matt in one word: _Ashmore_. Sam must've been keeping track of the days.

He realized then how lucky he was to have a friend like Shade. In the midst of all that had happened, he had still thought of giving- and he had never even _heard_ of Christmas before this year. He turned to his friend and embraced him. "Thank you," he said. "This means a lot."

He felt Shade's leg nudging him, and he looked him. The Night Fury was gesturing with his head back to the table. He looked over back to the counter and saw something else. A very large saddle.

"Whatâ€|?" he went over to pick it up, and understanding dawned on him.

It was for flying.

It would have to be tampered with a little, but it looked like it would do just fine. Now, when they were flying, he could have a much better grip, and they could go faster. It would also be much more comfortable for the both of them..

"Shadeâ€|" he said. "I don't know what to say to all thisâ€| Thank you."

Shade walked over to him and sat next to him. His wing shot out and wrapped around Matt's body, pulling him closer.

"You just had to write it in blood, didn't you?" he said. Above him, the dragon chuckled.

"I wish I had known," he said. "I would've gotten you something."

Shade shook his head. _Don't worry about it._

"No, I'm going to get you something," Matt announced.

Shade shook his head again and batted him gently with his tail. Matt playfully punched him lightly in the shoulder in return. "I don't care what you say," he said. "I'm doing it. You're more than a friend to me; you're a brother, and brothers get each other gifts on Christmas."

The dragon warbled affectionately, and Matt could tell that he felt the same.

After Matt cleaned up the blood, moved the saddle to the wooden table, and covered the counter with paper towels, he set to work on butchering the corpse.

As he was skinning the buck, he remembered how he had once hated this job. He had had a much lower tolerance for blood and gore in the beginning. Despite how much he could take in movies, it was different in real life. But now, he had gotten used to it.

He looked up as he heard muffled footsteps from the basement, where Joey and Brian were staying. The door opened, and they walked into the room.

"Hey, what's- what the hell?!" Joey exclaimed as he saw the blood soaked counter.

"Merry Christmas," Matt greeted.

"â€|the hell?" Brian asked. "We just walk in to see you chopping up a dead body, and you say 'Merry Christmas'?"

"Well it is," said Matt. "Today is December Twenty-Fifth."

"â€|Is it really?" asked Joey.

Matt nodded. "You bet," he said. "And Shade here was kind enough to hunt this down and surprise us all."

Shade grinned at them.

"Wowâ€|" said Brian. "That's a hugeâ€| whatever that is. Nice catch, Shade! Thanks!" He held his hand out to the dragon, who brought up his paw in a high-five.

"I could use some help with this, if you don't mind," said Matt.

"Okay, sure," Joey offered. They walked over to him, and as they passed the saddle on the table Joey asked, "What's that for?"

"That's for Shade," Matt replied. "I might have to make a few tweaks to it, but I think it'll do the job in the end."

They finished preparing the meat, and Joey and Brian began wrapping it up to store it in the refrigerator. Since they had no electricity, they placed the meat in salt to keep it healthy, and sealed it in zip-lock bags. Meanwhile, Matt went outside and used some of the propane his family had stored before Z-Day to start up the grill.

As he was warming the grill up, he turned to see that Shade had followed him out. "You want your meat cooked or raw?" he asked.

Shade didn't care. So he decided to cook it. As he was waiting for the grill to heat up, the cold began to gnaw at him. It was freezing out, and the most he had was a sweatshirt. He didn't have a jacket, and decided that he would get one as soon as possible. In the meantime, he knelt against Shade for warmth.

The bottom of the grill was almost completely invisible with all the meat he had on it. About half of it was for Shade, and the other half was for them. And that wasn't even all the meat. He had taken half of the carcass with him. They were going to feast this morning.

A half hour later, the meal was done and laid out in the dining room. The girls had woken up to the smell of fresh meat, and had wandered downstairs to investigate. What they found was a full dining table set with six plates loaded with deer meat. Matt and Joey were sitting next to each other, with Brian sitting on one end and Shade on the other. The dragon was busy wolfing down his food much faster than anyone else.

"Merry Christmas!" Joey exclaimed when the girls walked in.

"Wait, what?" asked Alena.

"Apparently someone's been keeping track of the days," said Brian. "And that someone told Shade here, who snuck out last night and caught us an enormous deer."

"We cooked some up for you," said Matt between bites. He gestured to the two empty chairs in front of him. As the girls sat down to eat, he went back to his meat and started cutting another piece. He stabbed it with his fork, and as he was lifting it to his mouth, he glanced over at Shade and froze.

"Jesus Christ," he swore. "Slow the hell down, dude. You're acting like you've never eaten a deer before."

Shade just glared at him between bites and went back to his food.

Matt sighed and brought to his fork to his mouth and bit off the meat, chewing it, letting the succulent flavors invade his taste buds. After he swallowed it, he said, "Honestly, Shade. You remind me of my dog sometimes."

Without even looking up, Shade smacked him in the arm with his paw. Next to him, Brian and Joey smirked.

When they were done eating, they decided to go meet with the others. Matt moved the saddle up to his room, leaving it to work on later, and they left the house to go to Sam's.

Earlier that morning, on the other side of town, the residents of Highland Drive were just starting to wake up.

Trent, who had been staying there after his return, had woken up

first. He made himself a small breakfast of stale bread and canned fruit, and then went outside.

His work was waiting for him out there. While he had been traveling the country, he had gained experience fixing up cars to drive. And now, he was trying to fix the Mazda that they had found sitting in Ben's driveway.

Ben had asked him personally to fix it up. Some scavengers had taken pieces of the engine and smashed some of the inner mechanisms, making it impossible to use. He and Anthony sometimes helped him, but since he was the earliest riser, he spent the most time on it.

When he asked Ben if he knew who it had belonged to, the boy's mood changed drastically. "I don't want to talk about it," he had said.

At that moment, Trent understood. "It was Katie's, wasn't it?"

Ben nodded.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Ben shook his head. "No," he replied.

Trent said one more thing before he allowed the subject to change. "I've lost someone too," he said. "It's hard. But we learn to move on." He put his hand comfortingly on Ben's shoulder, and said, "The best you can do now is live for the both of you. That's how I get through the day."

After that, he had gone up to his bedroom upstairs, fished out a picture of his wife and daughter, and looked at it for a little while. And, for the first in a long time, he cried.

When he was done, he returned to his work on the car. He was almost finished with it; in fact, he only had a couple things left to do. As it turned out, it would be another hour before anyone else got up. That gave Trent just enough time to finish his work.

"Sweet," Trent exclaimed at his put all of the tools away. "Now let's take it for a joy ride, shall we?" he said to himself.

He got in the car and found the keys lying on the seat. He inserted the key into the ignition and started it up. The engine coughed and sputtered for a few moments, but then it came to life.

He backed out of the driveway and drove down the street. As he reached the end of it, he turned left and drove deeper into Lyndrich.

He drove it around, driving through the back roads, for about twenty minutes before he decided to go back. As he pulled into Ben's driveway, the door opened, and both he and Anthony stepped outside.

"Dude!" he yelled. "You fixed it!"

Trent switched off the engine and opened the door, climbing out of the car. "Merry Christmas," he greeted.

"Wait," said Anthony. "Is that today?"

Trent nodded. "You bet. I found out yesterday."

"And you're just telling us now?" asked Ben.

"Well I wanted to surprise you. Anyway, I'm going to pay the others a visit. You want to drive?"

Ben nodded in excitement. "Hell yeah," he said.

They all got into the car with Ben at the wheel and he drove off. "Where to first?" he asked.

"Sam's," Trent replied. "That's where people seem to gather, and I need to talk to him anyway."

Ben nodded. "Sounds good. I'm just glad we don't have to walk there anymore. That was getting to be a real pain in the ass, especially in this cold weather."

"Yeah," Trent agreed. "Anyway, there's one thing I don't get about all this."

"What's that?"

"Instead of salvaging this thing for parts, why didn't they just take it? I mean, the keys were right on the seat!"

Ben shook his head. "I don't know, dude," he said. "People are fucking weird."

"You can say that again."

When they pulled into Sam's driveway (which was hardly even a driveway as much as a small strip of tiny rocks with weeds growing in between them), it began to snow.

"God damn it," Anthony complained. "Now it's going to be even colder."

"Yeah, we seriously need some jackets," Ben pointed out.

"Whoever goes out for supplies next, let them know," said Trent. "It's been long overdue."

They got out of the car and walked to the door. As Trent knocked on it, the snow seemed to fall even heavier.

The door opened to reveal Elizabeth. She nodded in greeting and stepped aside to let them in.

"Hey, Merry Christmas," Trent greeted. Sam, who was sitting on the couch reading a book, turned to them. "Hey," he said. "Merry Christmas! Come in, sit down." He gestured to the couch.

The three of them took a seat. "Did I hear a car out there?" asked Sam.

"Yep, I got us a ride," said Trent. "Listen, Sam, I need to ask you something. I know I've been really pushy about this, but I really need that flash drive. Do you have any idea where you might've lost it? Look, I'll go look for it if you don't want to. I just want somewhere to start."

Sam frowned as he thought hard about what to say next. "I think- think- I remember where I was that day."

Trent looked hopeful. "Where?" he asked.

"I think I wasâ€¦ somewhere on Long Pond Road. Yeah, that was it."

Long Pond Road was a very long back road that began about a mile down the street from Sam's house, and stretched all the way to the other side of town. About half of it was on the shore of a large pond, named Long Pond.

"That's a very long road, though," said Sam. "And it could be anywhere. Even worse, it might not even be there at all."

"It's a start," Trent said. "Thanks."

"You're welcome."

Suddenly, from outside, they heard a thumping sound. Ashmore, who had been curled up on the carpet in the middle of the room, looked up at that moment. The others looked out the window, and saw a flash of black wings taking off.

"Guess who?" asked Trent.

A moment later, there was a knock on the door. "I'll get it," said Ben. He stood up and opened the door. "Hey Matt! Merry Christmas!" he said.

Matt stepped inside, his dark brown hair full of white flecks of snow. "Merry Christmas," he greeted. "Jeez, it's snowing pretty hard out there."

It was true. Since they had arrived, the light snowfall seemed to have turned into a much heavier one.

"Anyway, Shade went back to get the others, so they should be here soon," he said. The couch was full, so he went to sit on one of the chairs at the kitchen counter. "So, how're you guys doing?" he asked.

"Pretty good," said Sam. "Ashmore caught a deer for us this morning."

"Shade did too," said Matt. "You think they planned it?"

"Definitely."

Matt glanced at the dragon lying on the floor, who had gone back to his rest. But Matt noticed that his ears were pricked up, and he was grinning slightly. He was listening to them.

Looking at the dragon gave him an idea. "Sam," he said. "Could I talk to you in the other room for a moment?"

Sam frowned in confusion. "Sure," he said. They both stood up and left the room.

When they were alone, Matt spoke.

"So the dragons both did really nice things for us," said Matt. "And I was thinking that we should do something for them in return."

"Like what?" Sam asked.

"I'm not sure," Matt admitted. He scratched his head in thought. "I was hoping you could help me with that one."

They both thought very hard for a minute. Then, suddenly, Sam smiled. "That's it," he said.

"What?" asked Matt.

"I know what we can do."

After Shade dropped off Joey and Brian, and went back for the girls, Sam and Matt snuck out of the house, with Swampert, who had been upstairs in Sam's room sleeping, following them. They dressed in layers in order to stay warm. Under Sam's lead, the three of them went looking for materials. When they found what they were looking for, they hotwired a car and drove to Long Pond.

"Alright, let's get this started," said Matt as he got out of the car. They walked out onto the frozen lake, making sure the ice was strong enough first, and found a good spot in the middle.

Their plan was simple. Swampert, being a water-type, could control the water. He could use this control to break the ice and extract the fish from it. Then, Matt and Sam would take the large buckets they had brought with them, and collect all of the fish.

That was the plan, at least.

"I'm not entirely sure this will work," Sam confessed. "He's never tried to control this much water before."

"Can he actually do it, though?" Matt asked.

Sam nodded. "After I was done making all the Pokemon, I did some research as to how their powers worked. Turns out, for him anyway, it's a form of telekinesis." He turned to Swampert. "Ready?" he asked.

The Pok  mon nodded, and turned to the pond. He pressed his front paws against the earth, and concentrated hard. For the first few seconds, nothing happened. But about ten seconds into it, a deafening crack resonated across the ice.

Matt saw, about twenty feet from the shore, a large fissure in the ice. Slowly, it began to grow, eventually branching out and forming

other cracks. Swampert grunted; Matt could tell the effort was depleting his energy.

Finally, with the loudest crack of them all, the ice broke. Water came gushing out of the newly-made hole, and spread onto the surrounding ice. To his excitement, Matt caught sunlight glinting off of wiggling shapes within the geyser.

Swampert continued doing this for a few more seconds, until he finally let up. He slumped to the ground and panted.

"That took a lot out of him," Matt observed.

"It's very hard for him to move that much water," Sam explained. "Now let's go get those fish."

As they made their way onto the ice- Sam bringing a stick with him to allow him to test it- they passed Swampert, and said their thanks. Swampert grinned at them, and grunted.

There were fish everywhere. Their wriggling bodies made the icy pond cover look like a living carpet. The snow, which had begun to let up a little bit but was still going strong, impaired their vision slightly, but not enough to prevent them from spotting the glint of sunlight off of scales that signaled a fish lying in the snow.

They gathered as many fish as they could. It was tricky, for the fish were still alive, and their flopping made them hard to grasp. Also, when the buckets were getting closer to being filled, they would sometimes leap out and have to be picked up again.

In the end, they managed to get two whole buckets full of fish back to the car. They had packed a large, red cooler in the back, and they now used it as a much more secure place to store the fish.

"Think they'll like it?" asked Matt.

"Definitely," Sam replied. "We haven't been able to get fish in a while."

"Yeah, same here," Matt said. "It's so funny, though, how much they like fish, right? It's like they worship the things."

"Well, I wouldn't call eating them worship, but I see your point."

Later, when night had almost fallen, they were all together.

Sam had surprised them all with a feast. He and Swampert had gone into their food stores and nearly emptied it for the occasion. There was dried meat, canned goods, chips; if it could be preserved, they had it. Matt even drove home to take some drinks from his parents' old alcohol stash.

Matt and Sam had brought out the fish they had caught, and had served them all to Ashmore and Shade. The two dragons were in heaven; they hadn't had fish in ages, and to them it was the greatest delicacy on the planet.

While the feast was far from the best he had tasted, Matt was having

the time of his life. Everyone in the world he cared about that was still alive- except Lucas was here, and all of them were having a good time. Even the dragons and the Pokémon.

Since they didn't have a dining table big enough to accommodate all of them, they were spread about the living room and kitchen, eating and talking away. Matt was sitting at the kitchen table with Shade, Sam, Ashmore and Samantha.

Despite all of the bad things that had happened, the good seemed to be building up today. And although the feast ended, while it lasted, it was a great conclusion to the first Christmas in the new world.

Or so he thought.

After the feast was over, Shade and Ashmore disappeared. Sam and Matt looked, but they couldn't find them anywhere.

When they did finally show up, they were outside, flying back from somewhere. They landed in Sam's driveway, sending faint _thuds_ through the house. Nick saw them first.

"Hey! The dragons are in the driveway!" he said. "And they've got some sort of box with them!"

The group rushed outside to see what it was. Shade and Ashmore were standing in the middle of the driveway, flanking a large, metal box. It had gotten dark out by then, but they could still see that there was something in it.

A lot of things, actually.

Shade and Ashmore offered it to the group. They had spent the last few days collecting items that the group could profit from, and now, they were giving them to everyone as a gift.

Nick and Anthony reached the box first, and they lifted it and brought it back inside. The first item visible in the box immediately got everyone excited.

Winter jackets.

A whole box full of them. One for every person; even Elizabeth. They all dug through them until they had each picked one out. Matt picked out a large, thick black one, with a hood. He tried it on, to find that it was very warm and comfortable.

"Thank you, Shade," he said, giving the smaller dragon a hug. "And you too, Ashmore." He patted the larger dragon on the head.

After they had picked out the jackets, other things were revealed as well.

"Oh my God!" Ben yelled with excitement when he saw what it was. "Vodka!"

Underneath all the jackets, the box was filled with flavored vodka. Ben grabbed at one of the bottles and opened it, taking a swig. "This is the greatest Christmas present ever," he said. "Thank you so

much."

Other members of the group began to take some of the vodka as well. Anthony was the first, and as he reached in, he felt something else at the bottom.

"The fuck?" he wondered. He dug through the vodka, groping for the object, and closed his hands around it. When he pulled it out, he looked at it and gasped.

"Tim," he said. "I think this is for you."

Trent, his face showing his curiosity, came over to see what it was and immediately snatched the flash drive from his hand.

"Oh my God!" he said. "You found it!" He turned to Ashmore, who was standing right beside him. "Where did you find this?" he asked.

Ashmore turned to Reuniclus, who was across the room from him, and warbled loudly. The Pokémon floated over to him and listened as he trilled something to her.

"He says they were looking for some other things on Long Pond Road and found it there," she translated.

"Thank you so much," he said.

"Here," Ben said, handing him a bottle. "Have a drink to celebrate."

"No," Trent declined. "I'm all set. I don't feel like drinking right now."

"Come on," Ben persuaded. "It's Christmas! Just one drink."

Trent seemed to consider. Finally, he gave in. "Fine! But just one drink!"

Ben grinned as his friend took the bottle and opened it. As he lifted the bottle to his lips, he said, "Let the night begin."

* * *

><p>So, what did you think? Let me know!

37. Chapter Thirty-Six: The Hangover

****Hey guys! Sorry for being a bit late.****

****So anyway, I'm not sure how I feel about this chapter in hindsight. I wrote this one a few years ago, and it seemed hilarious at the time. I still think it's kinda funny, but I'm not sure.****

****Also I discovered I'm terrible at romantic sub-plots, and there's the start of one in here, so... Bear with me with that, it gets better as it goes along. I think.****

****Anyway, enjoy the chapter!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Thirty-Six:

****The Hangover****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Within minutes, the party began.

Almost everyone took part. Even the dragons and some of the Pok  mon were coaxed into it. Soon, everyone was drunk- and the real night began.

It didn't take long for things to get out of hand. For reasons nobody seemed to really remember afterward, the group became scattered across town. Only Sam, Trent, Samantha, Lily, Jack and Reuniclus remained behind. They liked to stay away from alcohol (and in Jack's case she couldn't even drink). Evan also disliked drinking, however he went out anyway.

The night was pure chaos.

There were gunshots in the streets from the partygoers shooting zombies random things being detonated; Ben even drove his Mazda across town, blaring music at full volume while shooting his automatic out the window. He had more close calls than he could count. The portal gun was even used; it switched hands throughout the night. Portals were made out of every substance possible, and several of them were almost injured due to attempting momentum-based stunts.

The funniest part, however, were the dragons and the Pok  mon. Gengar was almost impossible to keep track of, because of his ability to turn invisible, and was constantly popping up in front of people out of nowhere, scaring the living hell out of them. Elizabeth was getting into drunken brawls with people- and winning. Swampert was creating mini-Earthquakes wherever he went, causing things to fall and buildings to collapse. The dragons were the most dangerous part. They were flying recklessly, doing idiotic stunts with humans on their backs. And until they ran out of shots, they were also blowing things up as well.

Their night of bad decisions would not last forever, though. One by one, they crashed. And when they did, it was in the weirdest places imaginable.

The first thing Ben felt was the cold.

The cold was chilling him to the bone. It was a wet cold, and his first movement was a shiver. He opened his eyes, and rubbed the sleep out of them. Then he looked groggily at his surroundings.

He was outside. It was early morning, and he was on top of a snowy roof. Most of his clothes were missing, except for his pants, underwear, and glasses.

"What the fuck?" he muttered. He noticed the aching pain in his head, and the empty vodka bottle beside him. And then, the memories came back. Well, most of them. He remembered driving his Mazda- _My God what was I thinking?_- down the street, blasting "The Depths" by Of Mice and Men, and then everything was black.

He looked around the house. It was a blue, two-story house with an average-sized lawn. The grass, like everywhere else, was overgrown and strewn with weeds and saplings, and covered with snow with the exception of several footprints. In the front of the yard, he saw his clothes on the ground; the black Seether shirt he had been wearing, his dark grey sweatshirt, and his brown winter jacket.

As he approached the edge and tried to find a way down, he heard a voice from the back of the house. "â€|Helpâ€|" it moaned.

He made his way back and looked over the edge to see a hilarious sight. Anthony was hanging by his feet from a rope. Ben laughed. He couldn't help himself.

"How the fuck did you manage this?" asked Ben.

"I don't knowâ€|" Anthony groaned. "I can't remember."

"Well, I suppose I should get you down," Ben said. He looked at the rope, and saw that it was tied around the hilt of his knife, which was buried all the way to the hilt in the wall. He bent over, found that it was within his reach and grabbed it. Putting all his effort into it, he began to wriggle it out of the wood. It was in pretty deep, and Anthony's weight on it wasn't helping at all, but very steadily, he was accomplishing the feat. It didn't help at all that one of his fingers was missing, making the knife harder to grip.

After about five minutes, the knife was halfway out. Things were getting a little harder, as Anthony's weight affected it even more. "Are you gonna cut me down or what?" he asked.

"Give me a second!" Ben replied. "I'm freezing my ass off while trying to dislodge a knife that just so happens to have all of your weight pulling on it! You want me to go quicker? Eat a salad!"

"Fuck you!" Anthony replied.

After another few minutes, the knife finally came free. Anthony fell from the air, taking the knife with him. He landed in a heap on the ground, letting out a grunt of pain as he landed. The knife landed merely inches away from him.

He weakly stood up off of the snowy ground and held his head in pain. He looked up at Ben, who saw that his face was a deep, angry red from all the blood that had rushed to it. "You couldn't have picked a less painful way?" he asked.

"Well I could've," said Ben. "But I didn't."

Anthony responded by flipping him the bird. Ben ignored him and walked to the other side of the roofâ€| only to walk right into Gengar.

"Holy fucking shit!" he yelled. The ghost had startled him. He scowled as Gengar burst into laughter.

"You think you're real funny, don't you?" Ben asked.

"Hey! Who's up there?" asked Anthony.

"Gengar!" Ben replied.

"Is he the one who hung me from the roof?"

Ben looked at Gengar questioningly, and the ghost nodded in amusement. "Apparently, yes!" he yelled back.

"That motherfucker!" Anthony cursed. "When I get my hands on himâ€¦"

Gengar grinned manically, and then disappeared. "He's gone!" Ben yelled.

"Fucking ghosts, man," Anthony cursed.

Ben walked the rest of the way across the roof, and then sat on the edge. He looked down and found a snowdrift a few feet to his right, and scooted his way over. He then pushed himself forward and dropped.

He landed feet first in the snow and managed to stay upright. He walked over to where his clothes were scattered- ignoring the uncomfortable cold coming from his bare feet- and put them on.

When he was all dressed, he ignored the discomfort of wearing wet clothes, and set off to find Anthony. "See anyone else around here?" he asked.

Anthony shook his head. "No," he replied.

Ben sighed, bent over, and picked up his knife. "Alright, let's go find everyone else."

They walked up the driveway and onto the main street. The first thing Ben noticed was the tire tracks; they swerved erratically across the street until they turned onto another road.

"This can't be good," said Anthony.

They followed the tracks until they reached the street. As they turned onto it, Ben saw something terrible.

The Mazda was poking out of a ditch off the side of the road.

"No!" he yelled. They ran over to the ditch and Ben looked at the horror in front of him. "My car!" he cried. "My beautiful car!"

In landing, the car had just barely missed a tree. Dread filled him as he went around to the front to see the condition of the car.

It was intact.

He let out a huge sigh of relief. The paint was scratched in places,

but he might be able to fix that himself. For now, he was just grateful his car hadn't been destroyed.

"Thank you, God," he said. He turned to Anthony. "Let's get this thing out of here."

In another part of town, Matt was waking up. He opened his eyes and sat up groggily, clutching his head in his hands.

"What happened?" he moaned to himself.

He looked around and saw that he had fallen asleep in a ditch in the middle of the woods. He was the only person in sight. As he tried to figure out where he was, the memories from the previous night came back.

Well, most of them.

He couldn't remember where he was, or how he had gotten there. He remembered doing a plethora of stupid things the night before, but everything went black after the memory of him and Shade flying.

My God—we flew last night? He thought in horror.

He decided to find out where he was. He stood up and looked around the area, eventually finding his own footprints in the snow. He got up and followed them.

He trekked through the woods, eventually catching sight someone up ahead. They were unconscious, and hunched over a log in the middle of two trees. He ran over to them, knelt down, and rolled them over.

It was Elizabeth.

He gently shook her until she opened her eyes. She sat up suddenly and looked around, one hand clutching her head.

"Looks like someone had too much to drink," said Matt, grinning. "What do you say we figure out where the hell we are?"

Elizabeth stood up and punched him lightly in the shoulder. She then began to follow the footprints.

They walked along the trail of footprints for several minutes, until they finally emerged into what looked like a field.

Matt looked around and recognized where they were. It wasn't a field, it was a lawn. The intersection in front of them confirmed it; they were at the turn onto Long Pond Road.

There used to be a house here, but a few years before Z-Day it had burned down. It had been condemned, and the local fire department had a practice session with it. Now, there was only a large field and an old, worn out barn.

Or, there _had been_ an old, worn out barn.

As Matt turned to look at it, he saw that it had been destroyed. The barn was now a pile of rubble.

"That wasn't like that yesterday," Matt remembered. "Come on, there might be someone in there."

The two of them ran over to the pile of rubble, and looked over it. A black shape caught Matt's eye, and off to the side he saw something sticking out.

A Night Fury's tail fin.

"There!" He pointed. They ran over and began pushing rubble off. Luckily, the wreckage here wasn't as heavy as it was towards the center, and uncovering the poor dragon was easy.

When all the rubble was off, Matt saw that it was Ashmore. He checked his vitals, and confirmed that he was alive. In fact, he was perfectly fine, save for a few scratches.

"Ashmore," he said sternly, shaking the dragon. "Ashmore, wake up!"

The Night Fury's eyes opened slowly, and he looked up. Matt could see confusion and pain on his face, and sympathized with him.

"Look, I know you're probably hungover right now," Matt said, as he remembered that Ashmore and Shade had drunken vodka as well. _Holy shit,_ he thought. _Best Christmas party ever._ "But we need to know if there's anyone else here."

Ashmore nodded, and slowly got onto his feet. His legs shuddered with the effort- the dragon was exhausted- but he managed to do it.

He lowered his nose to the rubble and gave a few sniffs. Then, he walked around it, trying to find a scent. When he was done, he looked at Matt and shook his head.

"Are you sure?" Matt asked.

Ashmore nodded.

Matt sighed in relief. "Okay," he said. "We should get you two home. Ashmore, do you think you could fly to your house?"

Ashmore nodded. The house wasn't that far.

"Okay, thanks," said Matt. He and Elizabeth climbed onto Ashmore's back, and the dragon took off.

Kody opened his eyes to complete darkness.

He sat up, gasping and clutching his head. He realized with a shock he had no idea where he was, except that he was in a bed somewhere.

He remembered parts of the night before, but not enough to tell where him where he had ended up. "What the fuckâ€|?" he moaned.

He stood up weakly and tried to find a door. He slipped and stumbled on what he realized was a slanted floor, and heard things falling over, but he didn't care. He just wanted to get out.

His hand finally came into contact with something that felt like stairs. He tested it out with his foot and confirmed that that was indeed what it was. He ascended them until his head came into contact with the ceiling.

"Motherfuck!" he cursed. His head hurt even more now. He clutched at his head, seething, until the pain died down a little bit.

He then stuck his hand up and felt around the ceiling, discovering that it was not a ceiling at all, but rather, a hatch. He found the handle and opened it.

Light poured in from above, blinding him, and causing his hangover to flare. He shouted in pain and let go of the hatch, and it swung shut.

When the pain had died down again, he opened it- slowly, this time. Once he was used to the light, he climbed out.

What he saw made him stop and stare.

He was in a boat. A huge one, with a cabin underneath it, which was where he had been. Only, it wasn't on the water; it was lodged in two large trees just off the shore of Long Pond.

"What the fuck?!" he exclaimed. He looked over the edge and saw that it was too high up for him to jump down. There was a ladder that looked like it was tall enough lying on the lawn of a house that was beneath him, but it had fallen over. He was stuck up there until someone came to help him.

Terror began to seep through him, and he felt panic coming on.

"Help!" he yelled. "Is anybody there?"

There was no reply. So he yelled again. And again.

It was on the fifth time that he finally got a muffled reply.

"Hold on a second! Jeez!"

It was coming from directly beneath him. He looked over the edge of the boat and saw a shed. The door to the shed opened, and Alena stepped out slowly.

"Alena!" he yelled. She looked up, and her expression immediately turned into one of shock and confusion.

"What the hell?" she yelled.

"I have no freaking idea!" Kody yelled back. "But can you put up that ladder for me?" He pointed to the ladder.

She looked to where he was pointing and saw it. "Sure!" she yelled. "Hold on!"

She dragged the ladder to a good position, walked to the other end, and began lifting it up. The higher it got, the harder it was for her to lift it, but she eventually accomplished the task.

The ladder was now leaning against the boat. Kody sighed in relief. It_ was_ tall enough. "Can you hold it still?" he called down.

Alena stepped on it and grabbed both sides. "Yeah, I think so!" she called.

Kody looked over it once more, and determined that it was about fifty feet tall. He took a deep breath and climbed over the edge and onto the ladder.

Rung by rung, he descended. He was terrified, as he had a strong fear of heights. But he knew this was the only way down.

By the time he was halfway down, he was so scared he felt as though his mind was starting to shut down from terror. His legs were starting to quiver, but he closed his eyes and kept going.

When he finally reached the bottom, Alena stepped off and allowed him access to the ground. He opened his eyes and leapt for safety, breathing heavily.

"You okay?" asked Alena.

"Yeah," Kody gasped. "I'm just glad that's over. I'm afraid of heights."

"Soâ€¦ where are we?" she asked.

"I'm not a hundred percent sure," he said. "But that looks like Long Pond, soâ€¦ We're either in Lyndrich or Winchester."

"Oh God," said Alena. "Please tell me we're not in Winchester. I don't want to walk all the way back."

"I hope we aren't," said Kody.

Suddenly, in the middle of the pond, the ice exploded upwards in a geyser of water and ice. They both immediately looked, just in time to see a purple shape emerge from the geyser and onto the ice-cracking it where it landed.

It was Swampert.

"What the fuck?" Alena cursed. Swampert, knowing the ice wouldn't hold for much longer, ran towards them on the shore. He left behind him a trail of cracks in the ice that were following him as he went.

When he finally reached the shore, he jumped onto solid ground, just as the cracks reached where he had been standing moments before and the ice broke. Droplets of ice cold water cascaded through the air, as they had been flung from his skin when he jumped.

"Hey, Swampert!" Kody called, running up to him. "Everything okay?"

Swampert nodded.

"Any idea where we are?" Alena asked.

Swampert looked around the area, and then nodded again.

Kody had an idea. "Do you think you could give us a ride to Sam's house? We should get back there." He knew Sam sometimes used Swampert as a means of transportation.

Swampert nodded and knelt down, allowing the two humans to climb onto his back. They did so, and then he bounded off.

When Ashmore landed in Sam's driveway, Sam immediately came running out the door.

"Thank God you three are okay!" he exclaimed. "We were worried sick!"

"I can't believe I got that wasted," said Matt, shaking his head. "That was just stupid."

"Yeah," said Sam. "It was. Where the hell were you?"

Matt put a hand to his head. "I woke up in a ditch in the middle of the woods," he explained. "Elizabeth was nearby, and Ashmore crashed into that barn at the beginning of Long Pond Road. The thing pretty much collapsed on him."

Sam's eyes widened. "Oh my God," he said. "Are you okay?" he asked the dragon.

Ashmore nodded. "He's just scratched up," said Matt. "Hey, have you seen Shade?"

Sam shook his head. "No," he replied. "Sorry."

The four of them went inside, to be greeted by those who hadn't gotten drunk: Tim, Samantha, Lily, Jack and Reuniclus. They greeted each other, and began to swap stories.

A few minutes later, Ben and Anthony pulled up in their Mazda. After that, Kody and Alena arrived on Swampert's back.

"So let me get this straight," Trent said to Kody, trying to hold back laughter. "You woke up in a boat, in a tree?"

Kody nodded. "Yep. That pretty much sums it up."

"How the hell did a boat get in a tree?"

Suddenly, Gengar appeared next to them, a smug smile on his face. Everybody jumped in fright. "Holy shit!" Matt exclaimed. "Stop doing that!"

"You!" Kody yelled. "You put me in a tree, didn't you?"

Gengar nodded.

"Why I oughtta-" he lunged at the ghost, who disappeared. Kody went sprawling on the ground, and the sound of diabolical laughter filled the room.

The next group to arrive was Nick, Andrew and Alex. "So what happened to you?" asked Ben to the newcomers. "Where'd you wake up?"

"I woke up in an outhouse," Alex replied. "In the middle of the tennis court in that park by Matt's house."

"How the fuck did an outhouse get in a tennis court?" asked Kody.

Alex shrugged. "I wish I knew."

"I woke up in the slide on the playground of," said Andrew. "Completely naked except for my underwear. The rest of my clothes were hanging off of the swingset."

Everyone laughed. "Shut up!" he exclaimed. "It's not funny!"

"Yes it is," said Ben.

"You wanna know where I woke up?" asked Nick. "I woke up in some random family's closet. With a dead zombie on top of me."

"That's freaking disgusting," Matt said.

"Yeah, no shit," Nick replied.

"I woke up in someone's basement," Evan commented.

"How did you pass out?" Matt asked. "You didn't even drink!"

"So?" asked Evan.

A few minutes later, Samantha noticed something out the window and pointed. "Hey, someone else is here," she said.

One final group had arrived: Jean, Joey, Brian and Jeremy. They looked just like everyone else: hungover. They told their stories. Jean had woken in a shallow brook, freezing. Joey had woken up in the town's deserted horse stables. Brian and Jeremy had woken up at Smitty's Wrestling Barn, with bruises all over their bodies.

"You think you duked it out?" asked Nick.

"I'm assuming so," said Brian. "How else would I have gotten all these bruises?"

"Wellâ€¦" Matt began.

"Don't finish that sentence," Brian warned.

Matt didn't. Instead, he changed the subject. "Has anyone seen Shade?" he asked.

Nobody had. They could tell he was worried about it.

Later that day, watches were assigned. Nobody wanted to do it, but it was necessary. Especially now, with the massive hole in their security that had been present.

Kody and Alena were part of one of the teams. They left at around

noon, and were hoping to cover half the town. Another team was taking the other half.

So far, the trip had been uneventful, so the two had talked, and gotten to know each other.

"So," said Alena. "What were you doing in this hellhole before we found you?"

Kody thought. "I was part of a war, of sorts," he said. "You probably know that, though."

Alena grinned. "I'd heard," she said. "What was that like?"

"You want to know the truth?" he asked. "It was horrible. I mean, we killed people." Bad feelings came flowing back to him. "They were bad people, but it doesn't matter. It doesn't make it any better. And they killed one of us-"

His voice broke, and his eyes began to glisten.

"You don't have to talk about this," said Alena.

"No," he said. "I want to." He tried to find the words. "There was a boy with us named Kevin. A really nice guy. It was on our first real fight. After the war started, we found an abandoned military camp. We found a lot of equipment, like landmines and motion detectors. We took some back, and set up a circle of booby traps about a mile away from our house. It took forever, but we did it.

"Kevin was the one who set it all up. He was kind of a tech geek, you know? Anyway, we got everything set up, and even connected the motion detectors to a sensor at our house. We were ready for anything.

"And then they actually attacked." He took a deep breath. "Me and Kevin went out to watch. The squad had about fifteen men in it. I knew what the traps were going to do, butâ€¦ It was still hard to watch.

"The traps took out about half of the squad. Then, they started running back. Me and Kevin stood up and fired, taking about three more out before they started shooting back.

"We took cover behind some trees- we were in the woods- and waited until they reloaded. When there was a break in the fire, we shot at them. Took about two of them out before it happened."

He stopped there. "What happened?" asked Alena.

"Theyâ€¦ they shot Kevin," he said. "Right in the head. He didn't even get to know what hit him. It was terrible. He was justâ€¦ dead."

"I'm sorry," said Alena quietly.

"It's not your fault," said Kody. "Anyway, I killed the last two, and then went back to the house. Andrew and Jean went to burn the bodies afterward."

They were silent for a few seconds, unsure of what to say. Finally,

Kody broke it. "What were you doing before we met you?" he asked.

Alena stiffened up at the question. "Traveling with Samantha," she replied.

"I know that," he said. "But I also know that wasn't always the case. What were you doing before that?"

She glared at him, and at that moment, he saw how much the question bugged her. It was in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have asked."

"Thanks," she said. They walked in silence for another minute or so, until she spoke again. "I was hunting someone," she finally said.

"You wereâ€| hunting someone?" asked Kody.

Alena nodded.

Kody could tell that was all he was going to get, so he decided not to push it.

Suddenly, a large shape blocked out the sun momentarily. They looked up and shielded their eyes to see Shade flying above them.

"The hell?" asked Alena.

"Guess we found him," Kody remarked.

When they reached the other side of town, they called the others with their walkies. A few minutes later, Ben and Trent arrived in the Mazda and picked them up.

"So, how was it?" asked Ben.

"Nothing really happened," said Alena. Next to them, Kody shrugged. "What she said."

"So Shade came back earlier," said Trent.

"We saw," said Kody. "He flew over us. Where was he?"

"Concord, apparently," said Trent.

"Greatest Christmas ever," Ben remarked.

They returned to Sam's house. After a couple hours, it was dark, and Ben approached Alena.

"Hey, we're going back to my place to play some cards. Wanna come?"

"Sure," said Alena. She and Ben had been becoming good friends as of late.

She got up and followed him out the door, saying goodbye to the others. "Who's coming?" she asked.

"Me, you, Trent, Anthony, Matt and Shade," he replied.

"How the hell is Shade going to play cards?" she asked.

"Oh it's possible. I've seen him do it," Ben replied.

They left the house and got into the Mazda. Alena got into the back seat, next to Anthony. Trent was in the front, and Ben was driving.

They drove, and talked amongst themselves. When they finally arrived, they got out of the car to see Matt and Shade waiting for them.

"Hey!" Matt called, sliding off of the dragon's back. "How was your trip?"

"Good!" Ben replied. "Yours?"

"Great!"

They went inside, lit some candles, and set up the cards. They played for a couple hours, and all had a great time.

Throughout the game, Ben noticed Alena looking at him. He was starting to like her. As more than a friend. He had realized it a couple of days ago. _Does she feel the same about me?_ he wondered.

Eventually, Matt and Shade left. They offered Alena a ride home, but she declined. But a couple hours after that, she was tired.

"I'll drive you home," Ben offered.

Alena smiled at him. "I'd like that," she said.

Is it just me, he thought to himself. _Or was that a little more than a friendly smile?_

They got in the car and he drove her home. On the way back, they talked, and it was then that Ben realized it. For the first time in a while, he was truly happy.

Maybe she likes me, maybe she doesn't, he thought. _We're both happy right now. And I guess that's all that really matters._

He dropped her off at Matt's house, and said goodnight. And then he drove home.

And who knows? he thought. _Maybe things will work out after all._

* * *

><p>So... let me know what you guys think! And see you next Wednesday!

****Hello guys!****

****I've got a few things to say before I start this one off. First of all, sorry again for being late. I'm seriously considering moving these updates to Fridays. Actually, I think I'm going to do just that.****

****Secondly, I'm currently enrolled in a Creative Writing class in college, and it's making me seriously consider new techniques for future writing. Because most of these chapters are pre-written (this one was written... two summers ago I think) and I'm actually working chapter twenty-five of the sequel, I can't fully improve it immediately, however, I'm going to try and revise this much better than I have been. If you guys decide you want me to go back and edit these past thirty-seven chapters in the same way, let me know.****

****Third, this, like the last chapter, is a case of I thought it would be funny at the time and I'm not quite sure how it turned out. It's also the last of those chapters. So... I hope you guys like it, but if you don't, I understand. I'm not going to cut it out, though, because it's part of the story and contributes to a character arc that I'm going to keep. In fact, the only thing I've actually fully cut out of this story in the translation to the interwebs is a useless love triangle that I'm not even sure why I wrote.****

****Finally, more romantic development, and I'm not sure I like how that turned out either. Writing this was a learning experience for me, and that learning experience was that I'm bad at establishing romance. I think I'm a bit better at handling it if it's already established, though, so just hold tight.****

****Anyway, that's all for now. I hope you enjoy this.****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD and Pokemon yada yada yada****

*** * ***

<p>Chapter Thirty-Seven:

****Acid****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

The next day, Ben and Anthony were out scavenging. They found a house nobody had searched yet in the middle of town, and broke in.

The place was a mess. There were items strewn about everywhere. From ornaments to clothes to food, they were all over the place.

"Well, it looks like we might be able to find some stuff here," Ben commented. They began to check out the house.

They checked for zombies first. When they found none, they split up.

Ben took the downstairs. He rummaged through the kitchen drawers and cupboards, and searched the closets, but found nothing.

He was about to go upstairs to see if Anthony had had any better luck, when he heard his voice.

"Ben! Get your ass up here!" he yelled.

Ben ran up the stairs, fearing the worst. When he reached the top, he found himself in a hallway with several doors leading off of it.

"Where are you?" he called.

"In here!" Anthony's voice came out of the room to his far right. Ben walked in to him and saw a bedroom.

"Looks like a teen's room," he remarked. "What is it?"

"This," said Anthony. He pointed into a large, black plastic container he had found under the bed.

"What's tha-" Ben froze as he saw what it was.

It was full of drugs.

"Jesus," he breathed. "This kid was fucking wrecked."

The container held all kinds of drugs. Marijuana, cocaine, crack, tobacco- even LSD.

Anthony pulled out a bag of weed and looked at Ben mischievously. "You thinking what I'm thinking?" he asked.

"Hell yeah," Ben replied. He smiled.

Several minutes later, they were lying on the bed smoking.

Anthony took a puff, the taste of the drug flooding his mouth. He inhaled the smoke and coughed.

"Dudeâ€¦" said Ben. "This is like the first time I've felt like this in so longâ€¦ Likeâ€¦ it was before Z-Day, when we had electricity and movies and society andâ€¦"

Anthony began to space out as Ben began to ramble on about things that happened before Z-Day. His thoughts began to drift, and he stared at the ceiling, doing nothing except taking more puffs and thinking.

While he sometimes missed all the things he had lost- his family, for instance- he found that since Z-Day he had gained a lot of freedom. Freedom that he cherished. He could do whatever he wanted now. Nobody could tell him what he couldn't do except him. And with that came a certain happiness.

Of course, the world was now a terrible and dangerous place. But if the zombies were to go awayâ€¦

Eventually, his mind came back to listen to Ben's ramblings. "â€¦She had just fallen out of a tree again," he was saying. "And she told meâ€¦ Dude, I just thought of something."

"What?" asked Anthony. "Does it involve more weed?"

"Noâ€¦ Damn it, it's gone," he said mournfully."

"Oh," Anthony replied. And then an idea came to him out of the blue.

"Hey, there was LSD in there, right?"

"I think soâ€¦" said Ben. "Or maybe it was acidâ€¦"

"Same thing."

"Oh. Right."

"We should totally put some in Sam's water bottles."

Ben grinned and started chuckling. "Thatâ€¦ that is the greatest idea ever thought of in the history of ideas."

"I know right?" asked Anthony. "Now, how are we going to do that?"

They drifted off as they thought. Then, Anthony suggested, "We somehow sneak in and spike them."

"Dude," said Ben. "That's the greatest idea ever."

"Right?"

"Hell yeah. Let's do it."

They got up and grabbed as much LSD as they could. It was in liquid form, which would make it a lot easier. Then, they left the house.

Sam had a stash of water bottles in his house. A very large one, at that. Since his house was the most visited, they decided to use his. They immediately got in Ben's Mazda and pulled out of the driveway.

During their drive, the two of them continued to smoke. Had Anthony been sober, he would have most likely feared for his life. Eventually, they reached Sam's house and pulled into his driveway.

The first thing they did was extinguish their joints and put them in their pockets with the LSD. Then, they went up to the door and knocked. Sam, who was home at the time, answered the door.

"Oh, hey guys," he said.

"Heyâ€¦" said Anthony.

"Come on in," he said, opening the door a little wider.

Ben and Anthony walked in as Sam closed the door behind them. They wiped their boots on the placemat, and then sat down at the counter in the kitchen.

"So, did you find anything?" he asked.

"Noooooooooooo," said Ben. "Not at all."

Sam gave him a funny look. "You two high or something?" he asked.

Anthony coughed in a sudden panic. He knew Sam, and because of that he also didn't want him knowing that they'd been smoking. "Hell no," he said.

Sam frowned. "Okay then," he said. "Do you want any water?"

"Sure," said Ben.

"Okay, I'll go get a couple bottles." He opened the back door, which was a glass slider door, and went outside to get some water bottles, which he had stored in a pile of snow under the deck.

When he shut the door behind him, Anthony and Ben sat there, waiting. Suddenly Gengar appeared in front of Ben, making him fall out of his chair in shock. "Ass!" he yelled.

And Anthony had an idea.

"Hey, you like pranking people, right?" he asked.

Gengar nodded, and smiled manically.

Anthony looked around to make sure they were alone. "Would you like to help us with one?" he asked.

Gengar nodded again.

Anthony leaned forward and whispered into where he thought the ghost's ear was. "We have some stuff," he began. "Some very strong stuff that makes people see things that aren't there. It's called LSD. We want you to take it and put it in the water. You want to help?"

He leaned back and saw a look of pure glee on the ghost's face. He nodded. Ben, who had stood up and had heard the whole thing, was smiling as well.

"Okay," said Anthony. He heard Sam approaching the door, and said, "Meet us in the bathroom." The ghost nodded and disappeared, right as Sam came into view.

He opened the door and let himself in with three water bottles in hand. He passed one to Ben and one to Anthony.

Anthony opened the bottle and took a sip. Then, he put it down on the counter and stood up. "I gotta piss!" he said.

Sam frowned. "Okay," he said. "Go ahead."

Anthony shrugged, and turned to walk to the bathroom. When he entered it, he closed the door behind him and turned to see Gengar waiting for him.

Anthony reached into his pockets and pulled out the LSD. "Quick, take

it," he whispered, handing it to him. "Ben will be in right after me with his. Only put in a few drops per bottle. We don't want them to overdose." Gengar nodded, and took the LSD and disappeared. Anthony pretended to pee, and then left.

Ben was waiting for him outside the door, and the two exchanged a nod as they passed. Then Ben shut the door and Anthony walked back to the counter and waited.

Later on, almost everyone had gathered back at the house. Anthony and Ben had received word from Gengar that the deed had been done, and all that was left was to distribute the water.

"Hey, guys!" Anthony, who was now sober, called. "Anyone want water?"

Almost everyone said yes. Those who didn't just didn't care. So Anthony decided to get them water anyway. When all the water was distributed, he smiled as their prank began.

Oblivious, the group opened their water bottles and started drinking. Anthony and Ben could barely keep their laughter in. Nick noticed, and looked at them weirdly. "Are you two high or something?" he asked.

"No, we've been sober for an hour at least," Anthony replied. Next to them, Sam nearly choked on his water.

Around them, people were drinking and socializing. Ben and Anthony sat back to watch the show.

It was between a half hour and an hour later when it happened. Everything was normal for Brian, when suddenly, weird things started to happen. First, the colors in the room started to intensify. The hues became much brighter, and struck out at his eyes. The light seemed to get more blinding, and finally, his vision started waving.

"What the hell is going on?" he asked.

Everyone stared at him in confusion. "What?" asked Nick.

"Holy fucking shit," cursed Joey. "Why is everything moving?"

"What the hell are you talkingâ€¦|" Matt trailed off. "Whoa," he said.

Things went like this for several minutes, until everyone except Ben and Anthony seemed to be having the problem. The two pranksters were watching and laughing their asses off.

"What the fuck did you do to us?!" Jean yelled at them. Meanwhile, Joey was sitting on the couch, rolling around with uncontrollable laughter. Things got even weirder for Brian, as everything in the room up to the walls seemed to be pulsating in and out. At one point, Brian looked across the room, and thought he saw someone walking out through the doorway to the next room. Someone he didn't know.

"Who's there?" he called. He got up, and tried to walk across the room in a stumbling motion.

Meanwhile, everyone else was having their own problems. To Andrew, everyone in the house had disappeared. "Hello?" he called. "Where are you all?" He got up and started to wander around the room. But he quickly realized that all the doors had disappeared. "Fuck," he said.

Nick was seeing everything in a shade of dark purple. Everything, from the walls to his friends to the dragons, who were also there, staring at everyone like they had gone mad.

Sam's was particularly pleasant for him. Everyone in the room who was human was turned into either a Pokémon or a dragon to him.

Everyone was like this. Finally, Trent, who still had an ounce of sobriety in him, put two and two together.

"You spiked our fucking drinks!" he yelled at Ben and Anthony.

"What? Aw, hell no!" Nick yelled. He ran at them and tried to punch them, but in his sight they disappeared. "What? Whereâ€|?"

"You guys are _so dead!_" Trent yelled. "I'm going toâ€|" Suddenly, he focused on something across the room. "Thatâ€| That is a giant floating face."

Ben and Anthony exchanged looks and cracked up even more.

"Hey guys," said Kody. "Where'd Brian go?"

Ben and Anthony looked around, and realized Brian was in fact gone. In fact, others had disappeared too. Alena, Brian, Samantha, Andrew, Jean, and Alex had all disappeared.

Jeremy looked around. "I don't know what you're talking about. He's right there. And he'sâ€| _really _tall. And bald."

"That guy really needs to get a haircut," said Trent.

"Shit," said Anthony. "This is bad."

"Tell me about it," replied Ben. "We need to find them. But we can't leave these guys."

"I'll stay here, you go look," said Anthony. "Waitâ€| what the hell is Evan doing?"

They glanced at Evan, who was on the couch, a nervous expression on his face. His eyes were darted around the room, and they could tell something was coming on.

A bad trip.

"Oh shit," said Anthony. "The crazy one's going on a bad trip. Everyone hit the deck!"

His nervous facial movements increased in dynamic, until finally, he snapped. He turned to look at Ashmore, and stared at him, a look of horror on his face. The dragon looked at him suspiciously,

waiting.

Finally, it happened. He stood up and whipped out his gun. "Monster!" he yelled. "It's a monster!"

He started firing. Luckily, Ashmore ducked, and the bullet just barely missed.

Shade growled ferociously at Evan, who was adjusting his aim for another shot.

"Fuck!" yelled Trent. Other people in the room jumped over the couches and ran for cover.

Ben and Anthony got up and ran to Evan, just as he took another shot and missed again. They reached him and tackled him, causing him to drop the gun. He struggled viciously, yelling and screaming about being under attack.

"Please! Just let me go!" he yelled. "Why are you doing this?"

"It's for your own good," said Anthony. They pulled him off the ground and led him across the room to the living room. They dragged him through it into the bedroom and threw him inside.

"This is so you don't kill anyone!" Anthony yelled, as they slammed the door.

Ben slumped against the door, holding it shut as Evan began to pound on the other side. "Go grab a chair," he directed.

Anthony nodded and ran to get a chair from the kitchen. He brought it back and wedged it underneath the doorknob so that it would hold the door shut.

"Alright," said Ben, gasping. "We need to get everyone else back. Let's search the house."

"You know, I'm starting to think maybe this wasn't such a good idea," said Anthony.

"Yeah, no shit," Ben said. "Come on, let's just go find people."

They walked back into the living room. Nobody had left, but they were all still hiding. Ashmore and Shade looked pissed, as did Elizabeth and Reuniclus, who were also in the room.

"Okay, nobody leave this room!" Anthony ordered. "I'm going to find the missing people, while Ben stays here to watch you."

"I am?" asked Ben.

"Yes, you are."

"Oh. Okay."

Anthony went up the stairs adjacent to the room. When he reached the top, he found Alex unconscious on the floor. From the looks of it, he had hit his head on the desk.

"Ouch," said Anthony. "Let's get you downstairs."

He picked up Alex's limp body and carried him over his shoulders. It was tough, but he managed to make it down the stairs. The couch was full, so he left Alex on the floor. "Anyone else leave?" he asked Ben.

Ben shook his head. "Nope," he said. "But Samantha came back. She said something about finding dragon's eggs."

"Okay," said Anthony. "I'll go check the other stairs."

He crossed into the living room, past the bedroom that Evan was locked in, and kept watch for his friends. Once he had cleared out the living room, he pressed on.

He walked up the stairs into Sam's bedrooms, and saw nothing in the first room. But he heard a scuffling in the second, as if someone was pacing.

"Hello?" he called. The noise stopped.

He went into the room and saw Brian there, with his gun pointing at him. "Who are you?" he demanded. "What do you want?"

Shit, Anthony thought. _Another bad trip._ "Look, Brian," he said.

"How do you know my name?" he demanded.

"Because you're on acid. I'm Anthony," he replied.

Brian frowned in confusion. "Wait, what?" he asked.

"I said, you're on an acid trip," Anthony repeated. "Somebody spiked your drink with LSD."

"Ohâ€¦" he said. "God damn it, who the hell would do that?"

Anthony thought that it would be best not to tell him that at the moment. "I don't know," he said. "But right now, you need to come downstairs."

"Okayâ€¦" he said. "Butâ€¦ wait, if I'm tripping right nowâ€¦ What if you're a hallucination?"

_Damn it, _ Anthony thought. "I'm not," he said.

"How do I know?"

Anthony walked over and slapped him in the face. "That feel like a hallucination to you?" he asked.

Brian stumbled back a half step. "Owâ€¦" he said. "No, I guess not."

"Then come with me," Anthony replied.

Brian followed him down the stairs and back to everyone else. "Found

another," said Anthony. "How many more are gone?"

"Three," Ben replied. "Looks like they left the house."

_"__Gengar helped you with this, didn't he?"_ asked Reuniclus.

"Yeah," said Ben. "Do you have any idea where he is?"

_"__Behind you."_

Ben turned around to see Gengar staring him right in the face. "Seriously, that's starting to get old," he said.

Gengar frowned. He turned to Reuniclus and appeared to say something.

_"__He wants me to tell you that he wants to help you find the others,"_ she said. _"As much as he likes a good joke, he realizes when it's time to stop. And honestly, I don't even know why you thought this was a good idea in the first place."_

"Alright," said Anthony. "Let's go find them. Reuniclus, you stay here with Ashmore and make sure they don't get out. Shade, you come with us."

"Why is everything orange?" Matt asked.

"Shut up Matt," said Ben.

_"__Alright," _said Reuniclus. _"If Lily, Swampert or Jack get back from patrols with any of them, I'll send Ashmore to let you know."_

The four of them set out. Shade almost immediately found a trail. Multiple trails, to be exact. They spread out in three separate directions.

They split up. Ben took one, Shade took another, and Anthony and Gengar took the third. They decided that if they found someone, or ran into any trouble, they would shoot their gun; once if they were in trouble, and twice if they found someone.

Ben, who had had practice tracking game since Z-Day, found signs that told him where the trail went. He followed it into the woods behind Sam's house.

Meanwhile, Alena, who had left the trail Ben was following, was in the backyard of a house.

Unbeknownst to her, she was having a bad trip. She could see dark figures in the forest, concealed in the long shadows made by the late afternoon sun shining on the trees. They were following her. She knew it.

"Leave me alone!" she yelled. Suddenly, one split from the trees and came running at her. Screaming, she drew her gun, but what she produced instead was a stick. She turned and ran for the back door of the house.

It was unlocked, and she let herself in. She slammed the door behind her and pressed all her weight against it.

The sound of her gasps seemed to be louder than gunshots. They would find her for sure. But beneath those sounds, there was something else. She just couldn't put her finger on it.

From the darkness of the basement, hands came out of nowhere and grabbed her. She screamed as she fought, lost her balance, and fell to the ground, her attacker descending on her.

The room lit up, and a deafening _bang_ echoed through it. The assailant fell to the side in a puddle of scarlet.

Alena looked up at her savior, and saw nothing but a tall, dark shape, silhouetted by light from the open door. She sat up and moved back, trying to get away. "Who are you?" she asked.

"Alena!" it exclaimed. She recognized the voice. "It's me, Ben!"

And suddenly, the figure changed. She could see him now. Ben.

"Oh thank God," she said. "Ben, what's happening?"

"You've been drugged," he said. He held out his hand and she took it. "You're having an acid trip."

"Oh," she said. He helped her to stand up. "That explains a lot," she said.

"Yeah," Ben replied. "Now let's get back." He walked outside, lifted his gun into the air and fired two shots.

"Let's go," he said.

As Alena watched him leave, she felt a peculiar impulse, and spoke up. "Wait," she said.

Ben stopped and turned around. "What?" he asked.

Alena walked up to him, grabbed his shirt, and kissed him.

The kiss was held for a few seconds, before Ben broke it. He was shocked, but other than that, Alena couldn't tell what he felt.

When he finally found his voice, he said, "You need to go home, Alena. Come on."

Anthony, Gengar and Shade found the other two, and they were all brought back to Sam's. They set up a watch around the house, and were assisted by Swampert, Lily and Jack when they returned. They did this all night, while they were waiting for the drugs to wear off.

About 10 hours after the drug was administered, it was the middle of the night. Anthony met with Ben, and they decided that the drug must be out of their systems now. They checked on everyone, and discovered that they were all passed out. They unblocked the bedroom door so that Evan could get out, and then left. They got in their Mazda and drove home.

On the way, Anthony started talking. "You know, that was funny and all, but let's not do it again. That was dumb."

"Hey, it was your idea," said Ben.

"Well, it was a high-dea," Anthony replied. "We all know those are the worst ideas ever."

When they got home, they checked the house and boarded it up. Then, they went to bed.

They woke up the next morning to a loud knock on the front door.

"Let me in!" someone yelled.

Ben groggily got out of bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Then, he slowly left the room and walked down the stairs.

When he reached the door, he opened it to be greeted by a furious Trent. "You two think this is funny?" he asked furiously. "You think you can just drug our drinks?"

"Look, we thought it would be funny," said Ben. "But it went too far. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, it went too far!" Trent shouted. "It went too far when you decided to do it! Were you high or something?"

Ben shook his head. "No," he lied, incredibly unconvincingly.

Trent's face contorted in shock and disappointment. "You were," he said.

"Okay fine. We found some weed and smoked it. What's the big deal?"

Trent raised his hand to his face in exasperation. "You've got to be kidding me, Ben! Look, smoking on the job is one thing. But that prank was going way too far. Do you realize what could've happened? You could have gotten one of us killed!"

"Look, I realize what we did was wrong," said Ben. "And I'm sorry. If I could go back, I'd do it differently."

"Well you can't go back, can you?" Trent asked rhetorically. "We've already dealt with Gengar, now they've sent me to deal with you two. We've decided your punishment. You're to have patrol duty every day for the next week."

"Damn it," Ben protested. "Do I have to?"

"Yes," said Trent. "And if I find out you're even thinking of doing something like this again, I'm gonna have to kick your ass."

He turned and stormed out of the room. Crashing footsteps made their way upstairs to Anthony's room, and a door slammed against the wall. As Ben heard his angry yells, he noticed something else. Alena was standing in the front yard.

When she had kissed him, it had left a deep indentation in his mind. He had been yearning for that for a long time, and when he finally got it, his soul had glowed within him.

But the light was diluted when he realized that she had only done it because she had been high. That made things different. Why would she come around after that?

What does she want? He wondered. He called out to her.
"Alena?"

She didn't answer. He stepped outside and walked over to her. "Hey, what's up?" he asked.

She turned around and punched him in the face.

He stumbled back and clutching his head. "Ow!" he yelled.
"Fuck!"

"That's for drugging me, you bastard," she said.

"I'm sorry!" he exclaimed. "We were high and we weren't thinking. If the thought that you could've gotten hurt had come up, I wouldn't have done it. And it won't happen again."

"It better not," she said. She sighed, and looked down. "But there was something else too," she said.

Ben thought he had an idea of what that something else was. With her next words, she confirmed it.

"I'm sorry aboutâ€¦| you knowâ€¦|" she said.

"It's fine," Ben replied. "You were drugged. We all do weird shit when we're high."

"Yeah butâ€¦| It's a little more than that," she said. She took a deep breath, and let it out. "I like you," she confessed.

Ben was at a loss for words. "Wait," he said. "Youâ€¦| _like_ me?"

Alena nodded.

He was suddenly filled with excitement. "I like you too," he said. "I can't believe this."

Alena smiled. "Really?" she asked.

"Yeah," said Ben. "Do you want to maybeâ€¦| go out sometime?"

Alena chuckled. "How are we supposed to 'go out' in a zombie apocalypse?"

"I don't know, butâ€¦| do you want to figure something out?"

Alena smiled, and hugged him. "Sure," she said.

* * *

><p>So, did you like that? Or was I right to be hesitant about it? Let me know, and I'll see you next week with a chapter I feel a lot better about!

39. Chapter 38: The Worst Year of Our Lives

****So, here we are again with a new chapter. I wasn't able to really look at this one in terms of revision like I said I was going to. Unfortunately, I had a busy week. Next week I'm hoping to do that, though.****

****Anyway, here it is. I hope you like it.****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter Thirty-Eight:

****The Worst Year of Our Lives****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

New Year's Eve had arrived. 2014, the worst year of most of their lives so far, was almost over.

For the past few days, things had been both good and bad. Alena and Ben had started hanging out much more often. At first, Alena wanted to keep their relationship a secret, but, thanks to Gengar, word almost immediately got out. The group was still angry at Ben—especially Sam, who hadn't looked at him the same way since after following Trent's lead in shouting him down. Despite this, however, most of them were still happy for the couple.

Other than that, though, things were going rather slow. There was the occasional zombie fight, but much to their relief, the massive hordes they encountered in Lawrence, Harristown or Gunnerville were nowhere to be found. The search for Lucas continued, but with no results. In fact, Gengar went to spy on Gunnerville again, and found it completely deserted. The only thing he found was an abundance of dead bodies. Ben guessed that they had tried to desert, only to be killed.

Then, New Year's Eve arrived.

To celebrate, some of the group came up with an idea. Matt was the one who had first proposed it, and some of the others had taken interest. The idea was to camp out in the middle of the woods, with nothing but fire, cards, food, drink, sleeping bags, and company. Some went voluntarily, others were coerced into it, but in the end, Shade, Ben, Alena, Nick, Evan, Alex, Anthony, Andrew, Trent, Samantha, Sam, Ashmore, Elizabeth, Lily, Jack, Gengar, Swampert and Reuniclus agreed to go. Brian, Joey, Kody, Jeremy and Jean stayed back, either keeping watch on the motion sensors or doing other things.

When the day arrived on Sam's calendar, the group gathered their materials, met at Matt's house and hiked up to Rockrimmon Hill

together.

They set up camp. They brought just enough tents to accommodate all of them, as everyone was sharing with someone else. Sam brought the biggest tent any of them had ever seen in order to accommodate both Ashmore and Swampert, as well as the rest of the Pokémon. Matt and Shade also had a rather large one. Alena and Samantha had their own tent, while the last two were occupied by Ben, Trent, Anthony and Andrew and Nick, Evan and Alex respectively.

Night was almost upon them, and they began to set up a fire. Once Ashmore had lit the fire, the dragons went to hunt as the rest of them gathered around the fire.

About an hour later, when it was dark out, the two dragons returned with three scrawny deer. Once they were done cooking the meat, they began eating. Ben took out a bottle of vodka and passed it around the group. Trent, Sam and Samantha refused, and instead turned directly to the water bottles they had packed.

At one point, they began to talk about their histories. Certain people had told certain parts of their stories to some others, but not everyone had shared with the entire group. So, naturally, this talk turned to them.

"What about you guys?" Trent asked Nick and Evan. "What's your story?"

"Well," Nick hesitated. "I guess you could sayâ€¦"

"We fought zombies," Evan explained.

"Yeah, no shit," said Ben. "What else did you do?"

"It's kind of a long story," Nick admitted. "We did a lot, actually."

"Hell yeah we did," Evan chimed in.

"Dude, we've got all the time in the world," said Alex. "We want to hear it."

"Wellâ€¦" said Nick. "Okay. Here it goes." He took a deep breath and began.

"Like everyone else, Z-Day was horrible for us.

"We were in school at the time, of course. I guess we were kind of lucky. We were in Band. That meant we had lots of heavy things to hit them with.

"We fought our way out, but it was horrible. It was disgusting and justâ€¦ awful. I'm still trying to forget the things we saw. I don't think I ever will. But we made it. Unfortunately, that wasn't the end of it.

"We made our way back to our houses. First, we went to my house, and then Evan's house. But both places were deserted.

"We never saw our parents again. Truthfully, Iâ€¦ I doubt they're

even alive. I think they died a long time ago. We lost a lot of other people that day. Some very good friendsâ€¦"

"When the military moved in, they found us and tried to take us to a shelter. But Evan, who was an angry, miserable wreck- yes, even more of a wreck than he is now- decided he didn't want to just sit around and wait for it all to be over. He wanted revenge. And I kind of agreed with him. We tried to talk them into letting us join them, but at first they wouldn't hear it. In fact, it took them a whole week to finally say yes to us.

"You see, that was around the time things were really starting to get bad. It was becoming clear that the zombies wouldn't just go away overnight. They needed anyone they could get, and it didn't matter anymore how old they were. They began recruiting anyone who volunteered, and they remembered us. I don't know exactly what day it was, but they came eventually.

"They spent about a week training us. They didn't have time to do it any longer. They taught us basic fighting skills and worked to get us in as much shape as they could in a week.

"Then we started fighting. They didn't have any uniforms for us, but they gave us some Kevlar and a helmet. We fought for a couple weeks before New Hampshire fell.

"The fighting was intense. We would go into cities crawling with zombies. Most of them were outside of New Hampshire, but in the last few days the pathogen had gotten inside the wall. We had about a mission a day, and some squads had more than one. We did rescue mission, scout missions, elimination missions, whatever you can think of. Sometimes, one of us would get bit. That was the worst part. We had no way of curing them, and the military couldn't let them live."

"If only they had known about the cure," Sam interjected.

"Right?" said Nick. "But I wouldn't have believed it if you guys hadn't told me."

"Speaking of which, how many doses do you have left?" asked Matt.

"Two," Sam replied.

"I thought you took more than that?" asked Trent.

"I did. There was an incident," Sam explained. "Long story short, I got bit."

"Oh," said Trent. "That sucks."

"Yeah. It did."

"Anyway," Nick continued. "Not every soldier was killed. Some, in a panic, tried to hide. Some succeeded, and turned before we got to them. That was how most bases fell. I think it was how ours fell, in the end, although I'm not sure."

"Why would they run?" asked Anthony. "They're just going to die

anyway."

"Instinct," Alex replied. "Their survival instincts took over."

Nick continued. "Really, it wasn't entirely bad. We got to kill some zombies, and made new friends â€" even if they did die in the end. And Evan got better." Nick looked over at Evan, who was smiling insanely. "Well, better might not be the word. But he stopped being angry and depressed, which is good I guess.

"Anyway, it was like that for about a week and a half before it all changed again. Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine fell. Canada wouldn't go anywhere near us except to stop anyone- or anything- from crossing the border. D.C. was busy being overwhelmed, and couldn't send us support. We were on our own. Soon after that, our base was overrun. It happened so fast. Like I said, it started with a soldier that got bit, and quickly escalated from thereâ€|

****April 10****th****, 2014****

Nick couldn't believe what was happening. The base was being overrun, and he didn't even know how. One minute, everything was fine. It had been the middle of the night, and they had been on duty. That may have been the only thing that had saved their lives.

Nobody could tell how the horde assembled so quickly from just one soldier, but it did. And the barracks went first.

There, the zombies had more of the element of surprise than anywhere else. Many soldiers had been killed before they were able to fight back. Those that had tried to fight got off a few shots, which alerted the rest of the base, but that only bought them time. Already, the base had lost many of its soldiers.

More soldiers went in, but few came out. Because while it took the virus twenty-four hours to kill, the process was much quicker if the host was already dead. Those that the zombies had killed in the barracks were already starting to turn, and that area had become the center of the zombies' attack.

It was then that Nick and Evan were called into action. The surviving soldiers were either evacuating the shelter or barricading themselves in the armory to form a plan of action. They were part of the latter group.

The base's commander, General Jamison, was still alive. He and his lieutenants were devising a plan. They had sent out scouts to determine where the strongest concentration of undead were. So far, only one party had not yet returned.

"Don't worry, Nick," said Evan.

Nick turned to him. "Don't worry?" he asked. "We're being overrun, Evan! If we lose this base, southern New Hampshire falls! And at the rate things are going, the north will fall too before we can get there! We're about to lose this war, which is possibly the most important war in the entire history of the world, and you say 'don't worry'? Are you insane?" Nick looked away, and added, "Oh wait, you are!"

"You don't need to be such a dick about it," Evan state calmly.

"I'm sorry," Nick apologized. "I just don't want false hope right now."

"Then how are we going to fight well enough to get out of here?" Evan asked. "If we want to survive, we need something to fight for."

Nick stared at him in shock. "Ohâ€¦ my God," he said. "Did you just say that? _You_? Jesus, that actually made sense!"

"And besides, it isn't false," Evan added. "We _are_ going to be okay."

"How do you know that?"

"I just do."

"What, are the voices in your head telling you?"

Evan looked at him in surprise. "How did you know?"

Nick sighed in exasperation and looked away. "Well, it had to end sometime," he said.

A commotion started brewing at the entrance. Nick stood up as some soldiers opened the door and let the final scouting party in.

They went immediately to Jamison's war council in the adjacent room, ignoring the countless questions being thrown at them. The army seemed to be holding its breath as they waited for the revelation of the General's plan.

Finally, after just a few more minutes, they got it.

The door opened, and General Jamison and his lieutenants marched out. "On your feet, men!" he barked.

Within seconds, every soldier was on his or her feet at attention.

The General was a man of medium stature and a bulky, muscular build. He was in his fifties, but still fit. His head was covered in short, greyish white hair and his ruddy face was covered by a mustache, sideburns, and light stubble under his chin. He was dressed head to toe in army camo.

"Men, as you know, we are losing this fight. I'm not going to sugarcoat it for you." He began. "And we need to keep as much of a footing as possible in this war if we want to even hope to turn it around."

He paused as his face scanned the room, then continued. "Which is why we're abandoning ship."

Gasps and murmurs of shock spread throughout the crowd. Jamison waved his hand, and silence descended upon them once again.

"We can't afford to lose anymore of you!" said Jamison. "And the base is overrun! We need to escape ASAP!"

"But we also need to take these undead motherfuckers _out_!"

Shouts of approval spread throughout the room. When they died down, Jamison continued.

"The mission is as follows: my squad will escort the pilots to the jets we have prepared in order to form an airstrike. We're gonna blow this place to the ground.

"But we don't have enough planes or bombs to destroy the whole base. That's where you come in.

"We've marked three locations in the base. These are where the zombies have gathered the most. You are going to get in there and fire flare guns to attract them to that spot. Then, get the hell out of there. Rendezvous at the town's northern border. Once we regroup, whoever's left will accompany me north to join the bases up there. Southern New Hampshire may be lost, but we might still be able to save the north."

Jamison motioned behind him, and two soldiers entered the room carrying a map of the base. Three areas were marked on the map: the barracks, the training area, and the mess hall.

"Smith, Robertson," Jamison called. "Your squads are to go here." He pointed to the barracks. "Rogers, Peterson, take your men here." He pointed to the parking area. "Jenkins, Shaw, process of elimination. Get some weapons, ammo, flare guns, and go. Good luck."

So far, they had been lucky. Nick and Evan were under Lieutenant Laura Robertson's command, and were on their way to the barracks. They were about halfway there, and so far they hadn't engaged any groups of zombies. Those that they did see, they were able to sneak by.

One of the other groups hadn't been so lucky. At one point, they could hear shots being fired in the distance.

They made it within sight of the barracks without any trouble. As they looked on, dread crept up Nick's spine. The area surrounding the barracks was crawling with zombies.

"Shit," Robertson, a tall, light-skinned woman with short black hair and green eyes, cursed. "There's a lot of them."

"We need to get closer," said Smith. He was a man of Asian descent and medium height, with short, black hair and a long scar running down the side of his cheek. According to the other soldiers, he had gotten it on Z-Day.

"How?"

Smith thought for a moment. "Run, shoot the fuckers, fire the flare, and then get the hell out."

They readied their weapons and waited for the command. Robertson raised her hand and held up her fingers. "On the count of five," she whispered. "Five—four—three—two—"

Nick gripped his gun in anticipation.

"One!"

They leapt to their feet and charged out of their cover. Once they reached a good range, they opened fire.

The zombies immediately turned to look at them. As they began shambling forward, the bullets ripped through their ranks, dropping them left and right.

"Clear a path!" Robertson ordered. They began shooting directly in front of them, creating an indent in the zombie line. The indent gradually turned into a gap.

They reached the zombies, and entered the gap. Nick and Evan were towards the back of the group, and they turned around to cover it. Bullets and blood were flying everywhere.

Finally, Smith gave the order. "Fire the flare!" he yelled.

Nick saw it all happen. The soldier in charge of the flare lifted it up above his head to fire- but just as he pulled the trigger, a zombie grabbed him. He fell backwards and the flare shot into the crowd of zombies. It was wasted.

"Motherfuck!" Smith cursed. "That was the only shot! Son of a bitch!"

"Shit!" Nick exclaimed. "What do we do now?"

Evan shrugged, and kept shooting.

"Alright, plan B!" Robertson ordered. "We're gonna have to draw them in ourselves! Use the sound from our guns to draw them in!"

"Are you crazy?" Smith protested.

"This is our only option!" Robertson replied, simultaneously shooting a zombie in the head.

"It's a suicide mission! The airstrike will hit _us_!"

"No offense, Smith, but this fight is a lot bigger than us!"

The zombies were starting to get close. They all kept shooting, but they were vastly outnumbered. This would be a tough fight.

Suddenly, a ball of light flew into the air. It soared above their heads until finally reaching its height and exploding.

"That was from the mess hall," said Nick, recognizing the direction. "They made it."

Somehow, the small victory made things a little clearer for them. They could do it. They _had_ _to_ do it. They just had to hold out longer.

Just then, a second flare exploded into the sky. It was almost time. They just had to last a little bit longer.

After another few minutes, the sound of Jamison's voice sounded over Robertson's radio. _"Robertson! What's taking so long?"_

Robertson explained to him what had happened, and what they were doing. They all braced themselves for the General's fury.

_"__Son of a... Okay, keep doing what you're doing. But get into the barracks! _

You might be able to survive the airstrike in the basement! The jets are about to take off! That's an order! Good luck!"

"You heard the man!" yelled Smith. "Get to the barracks!"

They kept shooting and slowly but steadily made their way to the barracks. The going was tough. At one point, while Nick was reloading, a zombie grabbed him. He yelped in terror and surprise, and would've been bitten if it wasn't for Evan.

Finally, they made it. Just as the door to the barracks was opened, however, they heard a deafening, roaring noise.

The jets were taking off.

"Get in, now!" Smith barked. They charged into the barracks, shooting at the zombies both inside and out of the building. They were almost in when one of the soldiers in the back tripped.

The zombies were on him before he could get up. "Help!" he pleaded, just as the zombies sunk their teeth into his flesh.

"Shut the door!" Smith ordered. "He's done for!"

Evan, who was closest to the door, slammed it shut. The last thing that Nick heard from the outside was the man's wailing pleas for help and screams of agony.

But they weren't safe yet. They had to get to the basement. As of now, there were several zombies between them and the door. _Some must've gotten in from outside,_ Nick thought. _But how?_

"Come on!" Robertson yelled. "The jets are getting closer!"

She was right. While they were in an ascent, the sound of them had started to fade. But now, it was coming back.

"Move it! Double time!" Smith yelled. They charged through the room, only shooting enough zombies to clear a path. They reached the room's exit and proceeded into the next room.

The jets were getting louder. "We're not gonna make it!" a soldier yelled.

"Yes we will!" Roberson yelled back. "Just keep fighting!"

The next room was considerably smaller, but there were still zombies in it. They kept shooting, and the jets continued to get louder. The strike was imminent.

They had finally cleared the room just as the noise from the jets reached a deafening high. They gave up shooting, and started to run, bashing in the skulls of any zombie that dared get in their way.

They finally reached the room with the basement entrance. But before they had the chance to feel relieved, there was an explosion behind them.

They sprinted towards the entrance, but the room was the biggest in the entire building. It had been specifically built for large gatherings. The explosions got closer and closer, until out of the corner of his eye, Nick saw a flash of orange light. He heard the ceiling and walls collapse, and felt an intense heat on his back. He and Evan started running faster, and caught up to the front of the group, just as another explosion blasted through the room.

Half of the room was gone now, but they were almost to the door. Curiosity got the better of him, and he turned back just in time to see the ceiling collapse with another explosion. He saw half of the squad disappear under a rain of fire and debris.

They were so close now. Evan and Nick were in front of the group. The door was in reach. Nick was terrified, but he pushed the feeling down and focused all of his energy on one action. He reached out his hand and felt it close around the metal doorknob. Filled with exhilaration from being so close to safety, he turned the knob, opened the door, and looked into what might prove to be his salvation.

There was a deafening roar, and he was in the air. And then he was falling—

Nick woke up to a pain aching from all over his body.

The next thing he recognized was the feeling of cold, tile floor. He opened his eyes to find himself in the basement rec room. An unbelievable amount of dust hung in the air, and even though the lamps were all off, the room was dimly illuminated.

He sat up and rubbed his aching head in confusion. He felt a hard, crusty substance covering the side of his head. He scratched some of it off onto his hands, and pulled it away to see what it was.

Dried blood.

With a flash, everything came back to him. "Oh shit!" he muttered, stumbling to his feet. Evan. His squad. He had to know if they were alive. He tried to take a step forward, but the ground lurched, and he fell to his knees.

He knelt like that for a few minutes, shaking, waiting for his strength to come back.

As he knelt there, memories of everything bad that had happened to him came rushing back. The zombies. His friends dying. His _family_ dying. Evan's insanity.

And now this.

Suddenly, he felt overwhelmed with emotion. Tears sprung to his eyes,

and he pounded the ground with his fist, letting out a shriek of rage.

Somehow, the emotional outburst must've given him strength. He stood up and took a step forward. He wobbled a little bit, but this time he stayed upright.

After a few more steps, he regained his balance completely. He turned to the place where he had woken up, marked in part by the blood specks on the ground.

The blast had thrown him down the stairs. He had hit the wall at the bottom and passed out. He couldn't quite remember that, but he could tell by the cracks on the wall above where he had landed.

I'm gonna need to get checked out later, he thought. _I probably have a concussion._

He looked up at the ceiling and noticed holes letting light in. He looked to the top of the stairs and saw that the door was open and letting in light. It was partially blocked by rubble, but a lot of light was still getting in.

He slowly and carefully made his way up the stairs. When he reached the top, he realized that he could probably crawl under the large piece of ceiling that was blocking the way. He dropped onto his belly and pushed himself underneath.

It was tight, and a little claustrophobic, but he made it to the other side. He stepped out into the blinding light, squinted, and lifted his hand to shield his eyes. When he finally adjusted to the light, he gasped at what he saw. The place was a ruin. The ceiling and almost all of the walls had collapsed. In some places, the foundation was still intact, but the walls were mostly gone.

Suddenly, he heard a moan behind him. He turned around and saw a large piece of rubble move.

Someone was trapped under it.

He jumped over the debris and ran to the person. When he got to them, he grabbed the piece of wall covering him and tried to push it off. It was heavy, but with the help of the other person he was able to do it.

"Evan!" he exclaimed. "You're alive!"

"Nick?" Evan asked. "What happened?"

"Don't you remember?"

Evan stared at him blankly, an expression that usually meant no.

Nick sighed and held out his hand. Evan took it and he helped him to his feet. "Let's see if anyone else is alive," he said. "And then let's get out of here. I'll tell you everything that happened on the way."

****Present Day****

"Nobody else from our squad survived," said Nick. "We're lucky to be alive ourselves. Truth is, I sometimes wonder why it was us that survived."

Everyone else was quiet. Finally, Ben broke the silence. "Holy shit," he said.

"That was intense," Matt added.

"I always wondered what it would be like to survive an air strike," said Evan. "And nowâ€¦ I still don't."

"What happened next?" asked Alex.

"Wellâ€¦" said Nick. "We went to the rendezvous point, but they had all left. We wanted to follow them at first, butâ€¦ I don't know. I guess after what happened, we were just kind of done with it, you know?"

"No, not really," said Alex. "But then again, I was always more of a military man than you."

"Well anyway," Nick continued. "We broke into a house and spent the night. The next day, we went back to the base and stocked up on weapons and ammo. Then, we found an APC that was still intact, took it, and eventually decided to stay at Evan's house."

"Wait," said Anthony. "You have an APC?"

"Ummâ€¦ yeah," said Evan. "We aren't supposed to talk about it. So shut up." Beside him, Nick was pressing his forehead into his palm in exasperation. "Shitâ€¦" he said.

"You had an APC this whole time and you didn't even tell us?" asked Ben. "Assholes."

"You haven't been using it either," said Matt observed. "You have to walk all the time. You need a vehicle to get places quickly. You aren't like me and Sam, with a dragon as a best friend." He gestured to the dragons, who were with the Pokémon and Ashmore in a separate group. Sometime during Nick's story, they had made their own campfire.

"So why are you choosing to walk everywhere?" Trent finished Matt's thought.

"To conserve gas," said Nick. "Unlike you Ben. And to save ammo. If we were to just drive it around, we'd lose all our ammo within the hour. You know how we are!"

"That still doesn't explain why you didn't tell us," said Sam.

"Alex, you're living with them," Andrew pointed out. "Did you know about this?"

Alex shrugged guilty. "I was sworn to secrecy," he explained.

"What the hell?" Matt complained.

"Look, if we had told you, you would've begged us to use it twenty-four seven. We have a hard enough time keeping Alex away!" Nick explained.

"Hey!" Alex protested. "I like my heavy weaponry, okay?"

"That still doesn't excuse it," said Ben. "I want to see it. Then I'll forgive you."

"Fine!" Nick gave in. "You can see it, but _nothing more_."

"I want to see it too!" said Anthony.

"Fine! You can all see it if you want!"

They talked for a little longer. A few minutes later, Matt spoke up and asked Sam a question. "Sam, what's your Pokémon's story?"

Sam frowned. "I told you already," he said.

"I want to hear their side of it," Matt explained.

"Okay!" said Sam. He turned and relayed the question to the Pokémon. They began to converse with each other about how to answer the humans' question. Then, they reached a consensus, and Reuniclus floated over to the campfire.

"_Well," _she said. "_It's weird. We don't really remember anything from the first few days. Our first memories were of Sam and Ashmore and each other, as well as growing into our final forms- which was very unpleasant, because of how fast we grew- and developing our abilities. I didn't always have telekinesis, you know. I had to work up to it. Same with my telepathy."_

"How good is your telekinesis, anyway?" asked Samantha.

"_Well!" To tell the truth, I'm not sure what my limits are yet," Reuniclus replied. "_But I could show you a few tricks if you'd like. In fact, we all could"_

The group agreed that they'd like to see some. Reuniclus turned to the tents and closed her eyes, concentrating on them. For about a minute, nothing happened.

"What're you doing?" asked Alex. Sam turned to him, irritated, and raised his index finger to his lips.

"_Sorry," Alex mouthed.

Finally, her eyes opened, and Sam's tent started to move. The poles holding it up slipped out of their clips and began to slide out of the tent.

The group watched in awe as the poles came free and folded themselves midair. They arranged themselves perfectly on the ground while the tent stayed perfectly upright. Next, the ten stakes pulled themselves out of the ground next to the poles. Then the rain fly floated off and folded itself. It fell to the ground next to the tent. The tent

itself collapsed, folded, and rolled itself up. Finally, everything arranged itself perfectly in the tent bag, and it zipped itself.

Everyone was speechless. Finally, Ben said, "Guess who's breaking camp tomorrow!"

"Holy shit," said Matt. "That was awesome!"

"Yeah," said Sam. "But now where are we going to sleep?"

_"__Don't worry," _said Reuniclus. _"I'm not done yet."_

The tent unzipped itself. Suddenly, all of the pieces came floating out at once. The tent unfolded itself, and then it inflated while the poles found their way in and the stakes pinned it to the ground simultaneously. In seconds, it was done.

Then, the rain fly unfolded itself and spread over the tent.

Once it was done, everyone applauded. "Why didn't you help us set up camp?" asked Nick. "We could've saved so much time!"

_"__You didn't ask,"_ Reuniclus replied.

"That was pretty good," said Andrew. "But I can do better."

"How the hell could you do better?" asked Matt.

"Easy. I'm doing it right now."

"Howâ€|?"

_"__That's not Andrew,"_ Reuniclus warned.

Matt looked around, and realized that Gengar was nowhere in sight. It seemed that Sam had reached the same conclusion, because just then he ordered, "Gengar! Get out of him!"

"Awww, do I have to?" Gengar asked. "It's nice and warm in here."

"Out!"

"Oh fine." Suddenly, Andrew's eyes closed and his body slumped backwards as Gengar left it. Next to him in the air, the ghost materialized with a devious grin on his face.

Andrew groaned and opened his eyes. As soon as he saw Gengar above him, he sat straight up and struck out at the ghost. Gengar disappeared before he could strike him, and a taunting, inhuman chuckle could be heard from where he was.

"You motherfucker!" Andrew yelled.

He turned to see everyone else laughing. "It's not funny!" he protested, though even he was chuckling.

"Yes it is," Ben corrected.

Each of the other Pok  mon took a turn at showing off their powers. First, it was Elizabeth's turn. She walked over to Reuniclus and appeared to say something into her ear.

_"_She says she wants a volunteer,"_ Reuniclus translated.

Alex stood up. "I'll do it," he offered.

_"_Okay. Come over here and step in front of her."_

Alex did as he was told, and stood in front of Elizabeth. He looked down at her and grinned.

Without warning, she picked him up by the waist and held him above her shoulder. "Hey, what're you-" Before he had time to finish his sentence, Elizabeth threw him across the clearing. He flew for almost fifty feet before being frozen in midair.

_"_Can't have any broken bones, can we?"_ asked Reuniclus.

"Holy fuck!" Alex exclaimed. "I need some new pants."

Reuniclus lowered him to the ground while the rest of the group applauded. He returned to the camp, dazed but smiling. "Normally, I'd kick your ass," Alex said as he passed Elizabeth. "But I'm too impressed. That and I'm afraid you could kill me if we got in a fight."

Elizabeth grinned, and Alex sat down.

Lily was up next. She too asked for a volunteer. After what had happened with Elizabeth, however, nobody wanted a part of it. Finally, Evan spoke.

"I volunteer Anthony," he said.

"Wait, what?" asked Anthony. "No! Why? I don't-"

He froze, and everyone around the campfire felt a strange electrical charge in the air.

"Anthony?" asked Alena. "Are you okay?"

Anthony didn't say anything. In fact, he didn't even move.

By then, Lily had moved to a spot several feet behind him. She produced a string of web and launched it at him. It stuck to his back, and she started to pull it towards her. Anthony fell backward and was dragged across the ground towards the giant spider.

When he was close enough, Lily stopped pulling and climbed on top of him. She began producing web and wrapping him in it at blinding speeds. In less than a minute, everything but Anthony's head was covered.

Lily turned to Reuniclus and nodded. Suddenly, Anthony levitated into the air and floated back into his seat. By now, the group was roaring with laughter. Anthony still couldn't move.

Suddenly, a loud crackling noise echoed through the air, startling

those at the campfires. Accompanying it was a bright flash of light. They turned to see Lily glowing with a blue energy. Electricity. Bolts of miniature lightning shot from her body into the ground and into the trees.

The group loudly applauded as Lily kept it up for a while. Finally, she ran out of energy and walked back to the rest of the Pok mon.

What the " Anthony moaned, as his sense returned. "Evan!" he yelled. "Oh my God, Evan, I swear when I get my hands on you "

"You can't," Evan pointed out.

Anthony looked down at the web holding him back. "Evan," he said. "Cut me out. Now."

"No," he replied.

"I promise I won't kick your ass if you do," Anthony offered.

"You will," Evan retorted.

"No  I won't. I promise," Anthony said, his voice dripping with anger.

" Really?"

"Yes."

Evan considered it. Finally, he pulled out his knife and cut into the web. He pulled it up, being careful not to cut Anthony, until he reached the neck. Anthony, his arms now free, ripped the rest of the web off and tossed it into the fire. The already large fire roared even bigger.

Anthony then turned and lunged at Evan- but was frozen by Reuniclus's powers.

_"__Nuh-uh," _Reuniclus scolded. _"You promised."_

She set Anthony back in his seat, who sat there, looking really pissed off.

Jack was next. She floated into a spot a good distance from the group. The light from the fire only barely illuminated her, until without warning, she burst into flame.

The fire moved. It wrapped around her entire body in a fluid motion until she was covered in it. Then, it reached out into the air around her. It gracefully flowed through the air like a stream, forming complex shapes and patterns. It was a beautiful sight that amazed all of them. It even touched Anthony, angry as he was.

Once she was done, things went back to normal, and the demonstrations were done. Swampert would have gone, but as Reuniclus told them, he couldn't do anything without causing danger to everyone.

"These Pok mon  They're really something special," Trent

complimented Sam.

"Thanks," Sam replied, practically bursting with pride.

The group returned to their previous discussion.

"You know who's story we haven't heard yet?" asked Samantha. "Shade and Ashmore's."

"I'd like to hear that," said Nick.

"I'm not sure if that's a good idea," said Matt.

"Yeah, it's not a very happy one," Sam agreed.

"Neither are ours," said Alex. "But Nick told his anyway."

"Come on!" Alena pressured. "We want to know!"

"Fine," Matt gave in. "We'll tell it. But only if they say it's okay."

He got up and walked over to the dragons to ask them. When he returned, he brought the answer.

"They say if you really want to know, you can. But they're not going to want to talk about it much afterwards. They're trying to put it all behind them. In fact, the only reason they're letting us tell you is because they think you have a right to know. Understood?"

Everyone nodded, and Matt and Sam began the story. They started in the lab, with the terrible conditions and cruel scientists. They told them about Shade and Ashmore's friendship. Then, they went on to talk about Dr. Corvus and his sadistic experiments.

When they mentioned the doctor's name, Trent frowned. "That name sounds familiar. I swear I've heard it before I just can't remember where."

They continued with Shade and Ashmore's escape and separation. Then, Matt described Shade's journey, up to the point where they met each other. Sam did the same for Ashmore.

"And that's it, I think," said Sam. "Was there anything else, Matt?"

Matt shook his head. "Nope."

The group was speechless. "Jeez," said Ben. "I thought my story was bad."

"Excuse me for a moment," said Samantha, while standing up. "I need to go hug them." She walked over and held each of them in a long, emotional embrace. "I know we're not supposed to talk about it, but I just wanted to say I'm sorry all that happened to you. We all are."

Ashmore placed his paw on her shoulder, nodded, and crooned happily. "Thank you," his eyes said. Shade smiled at her.

Samantha returned to her seat. "Okay, I know you all feel bad for them, but Samantha just said it for all of us, and that's enough. They don't want everyone else drawing attention to it, and I think we should respect that," said Matt.

Ben nodded. "I can understand that," he empathized.

"There's still one thing that bothers me though," said Trent.

"What?" asked Nick. "That that happened?"

"Well, yeah," said Trent. "But something else tooâ€¦ Dr. Corvusâ€¦ I know I've heard that name before."

"In the obituaries?" Ben asked hopefully.

"Noâ€¦" said Trent. "It wasn't that, unfortunatelyâ€¦"

"Awwâ€¦"

"If only," said Matt. "I'll tell you one thing, though; if I ever find out he's still alive, I'll finish what Shade started."

"I'll help," Sam offered.

"Me too," said Samantha. "But then, you probably knew that Sam." Sam and Samantha pretty much agreed on everything nowadays. In fact, they hadn't disagreed once. It was a little unsettling.

"No, but seriously," said Trent. "It's driving me crazy."

"Just forget about it," said Andrew. "It'll come to you."

"I guessâ€¦" said Trent.

"So, since we seem to be telling our stories tonight, how about you finally tell us yours, Matt?" asked Ben.

Matt shook his head. "No," he said.

"Oh come on!" Nick protested. "I just told you all about the hell _I_ went through. You think that was easy for me? I know it's hard, man, but you've got to get it out sometime. Trust me, it feels better."

"No," Matt said, more adamantly this time.

"He's right," said Sam. "It would help you."

"No!" Matt exclaimed. "I'm not ready. And I don't know if I'll ever be."

"Listen to your dragon!" Ben said. "We have a right to know."

"Then read my mind!" Matt retorted.

_"__I can,"_ said Reuniclus. _"Do you want me too?"_

"No!" Sam exclaimed. "Listen Matt, if you don't want to talk about it, we'll shut up. But I do think it would help you."

"Look, I'm not the only one who's not sharing!" said Matt. "Look at Ben! Trent! They haven't told us anything other than the obvious! And Alena! We barely know anything about her past at all!" He sighed, and tried to calm down. "Everyone deals with this in their own way," he said. "So far, my way's working for me. So please, _please_ just leave it alone!"

He stopped talking. Nobody was sure exactly what to say.

Finally, the silence was broken by Alex. "So, happy things, anyone?"

The rest of the campfire was considerably more cheerful. But after another couple of hours, it was starting to get late.

"Alright, it's getting late," said Sam. "I'm off to bed."

"Yeah, me too," said Samantha. "Good night everyone."

"Good night!" said the group.

"Happy New Years!" said Sam. "Welcome to 2015."

"Who knows?" asked Alex. "Maybe it'll be better than 2014."

"I'm pretty sure 2014 was the worst year in history," said Nick. "_Anything_ would be better than this."

"Well, I mean, it might," said Ben. "It's the middle of winter, and it's been months. The zombies should be starting to decompose by now. They might be all gone this time next year."

"Yeah," said Matt. But just then, he realized something was troubling him.

A little bit later, he realized that he was very tired, and felt like going to bed as well. He stood up and yawned. "Well, I'm gonna go to bed too. Good night, everyone!"

He went to bed. Over the next hour, Evan, Trent, Nick, Reuniclus and Lily went to sleep as well, leaving a considerably smaller campfire group.

The cold was starting to get the better of them, even with the fire. What didn't help was that the humans' fire was dying. Ben and Alena were snuggling together to keep warm. Every once in a while, they would lean in and kiss each other.

"So, how are you two doing together?" asked Andrew.

"Pretty good," replied Alena. "It's a little too early to tell, butâ€¦ I think this might work."

"Same here," said Ben.

"Hell, you just remember how lucky you are, Ben," said Alex. "You actually have a girlfriend."

Ben chuckled, and looked at Alena adoringly. "Yeah, I guess you're right," he said.

Things had been going well between them so far. It had only been a few days, but they had spent a lot of time together, whether it was around others, or alone. They went on patrols together, and went scavenging and hunting together. Ben hadn't told anyone, but he had a great idea for a date. He was going to approach Shade and ask him for his help in taking Alena on a romantic flight around Lyndrich and the surrounding area. He didn't think she'd been on a dragon flight yet, and was determined to show her how amazing it was.

The others started talking about girls. Ben, not being allowed to take part in the conversation in front of Alena, took the opportunity to ask her something.

"What Matt said earlier, about you not telling us anything about your past," he did have a point. What _is_ your story?"

Alena sighed, and looked away. "I don't think I'm ready to share that yet," she said. "It's," pretty bad."

Ben smiled. "It's okay," he said. "If you're not ready, you're not ready. But whenever you want to get it out," I'm here."

Alena smiled, leaned in, and kissed him. "Thanks," she said. "But I will tell you what I told Kody though. Before I met Samantha, I was," hunting someone. Someone that made my life hell Before."

"Well," did you get him?" asked Ben.

"Let's just say he's not around anymore."

They sat there in silence, as the others talked, and just enjoyed each other's company.

"I think I might be going to bed soon," said Alex. "It's getting way too cold."

As if on cue, one of the dragons shot a fireball into the fire, causing it to roar to new heights.

"Fucking showoffs!" Anthony yelled.

Matt couldn't sleep.

Something wasn't right, and he knew it. Something about what Ben had said earlier. He was trying to think about what it might be, but it wouldn't come to him.

He tried going to sleep, thinking that maybe it would come to him in the morning. But the cold was keeping him up. He hadn't packed as much as everyone else, because having Shade next to you was the equivalent of sleeping with ten blankets. But Shade wasn't tired yet.

So Matt laid there, trying to get warm and go to sleep, all the while waiting for Shade.

Finally, the dragon appeared in the tent. Matt had left the door flap unzipped so that the dragon could have access. Matt sat up and greeted his friend.

"Hey," he said. "Thank God you're here. I'm freezing."

Shade stepped all the way into the tent, and Matt reached over and zipped the flap shut. He laid back down, and Shade curled up next to him, coiling his tail around him. But he didn't lie all the way down. Matt could sense there was something he wanted to say.

He looked up at the Night Fury, who was looking at him with concern in his eyes. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Shade gestured to out at the campfire, and then to him. And then Matt realized.

He heard the argument about my past.

"I'm fine," he said. "Don't worry, I was just a little irritated at them, that's all."

But there was something else, too. As he looked into the emerald green eyes of his friend, he saw another message. _Do you want to talk about it with me?_

Matt grinned. "You're such a good friend, you know that? This was a horrible year for me, but at the same time, meeting you was one of the best parts of my life," he complimented. "I'm sorry, though. I'm not ready to talk about it. But I promise you, one day I will. But only to you. I haven't decided about anyone else yet."

Shade nodded, and flashed him a dragon grin. Then, they both rested their heads. Shade spread his wing over Matt, lending him his warmth, but leaving an opening to allow fresh air.

"Goodnight, Shade," said Matt. "I'll see you in the morning."

But despite the dragon's comforting warmth, he still didn't fall asleep right away. As tired as he was, there was still something bugging him—

And then he realized what it was.

Ben said the zombies might be gone soon. Because they should be decomposing. But as Matt searched his memory, he realized that wasn't true. He had never seen a single piece of evidence that a zombie was decomposing.

In fact, they seemed to be getting better.

* * *

><p>Let me know what you guys think! See you next week!

****I think I'm just going to bring the update day back to Sunday.****

****Anyway, of all the more quiet, character-driven chapters I've been putting out recently, this one is probably my personal favorite. I hope you like it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon or HTTYD.****

*** * ***

<p>Chapter Thirty-Nine:

****Two Weeks****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

The first days of 2015 proved to be a vast improvement over 2014. They were together, and for now, they were safe and happy.

Of course, not everyone was okay. Lucas remained missing. Only God knew what kind of hell he might be going through. They desperately wanted to find him, but they had no leads. They began searching Gunnerville, on the lookout for any indication as to where the mysterious army had gone. So far, they had found nothing.

But that was not all that happened. There were some very important things that happened over the next two weeks. Some that shaped the future, others that answered to the past, and others still that improved the present.

After the night at the campfire, Trent spent the next few days studying the flash drive yet again. The name Dr. Corvus had stirred up memories, and he had a feeling the flash drive would provide him with answers.

When Ben came to check on him, he revealed what he had found.

"The details are sketchy," he explained. "But I've confirmed a few things." He opened a Word document on their laptop. "They had a whole bio on him. It was mostly stuff we don't really need. First name Jack, born in America, that kind of thing. But some of it was interesting..."

"Like what?" Ben asked.

"Well, his name pops up all over the country. I mean, this guy got around. He was obviously high up on the ladder. It never really explains his work, but it does say he was big on genetic engineering. I think we can assume he knew about the pathogen."

"Anything from Shade and Ashmore's lab?"

"Yes, that was his last station before Z-Day," said Trent. "There's nothing that says whether he survived or not. But that does lead me to another thing. As we know, he did some pretty horrible things in that lab. But it wasn't the only time. This guy's fellow doctors didn't like him at all. In fact, he's had some pretty serious accusations thrown at him."

"So he was either a douche, or his methods were highly unorthodox," Ben inferred. Based on the dragons' story, I'm gonna say both."

"Yeah. Definitely. That's all I've been able to find on him. These filesâ€¦ There's some good information in them, but there's so much more that isn't. I've been working on this theoryâ€¦ The guy I took this stuff from in Chicago was really high up. But there were others like him. They obviously wanted to keep these experiments hidden, so I think they split the files up. They gave pieces to every person, but told no one how they all fit together."

Ben nodded. "That's pretty smart of them," he commented. "But wait, if they wanted to keep it a secret so badly, why did they tell _everyone_ after Z-Day?"

Trent frowned and shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "That doesn't really add up. I've always been confused about that, to tell the truth."

"Wellâ€¦ let me know if you find anything else, then," said Ben.

"I will," Trent replied.

Trent didn't find anything else in those two weeks, but he kept looking.

The next day, Ben approached Shade when they were both at Sam's house. The dragon was- presumably- in a conversation with Ashmore, when Ben approached him from behind and tapped his shoulder. When the Night Fury turned to acknowledge him, he asked, "Hey, can I talk to you in private?"

Shade nodded, and followed Ben into the first floor bedroom, where they would be alone. Ben shut the door and turned to the dragon.

"I require your services," Ben announced. He then looked around, realized that they were in a bedroom, and said, "Okay, that came out wrong. But I need your help."

Shade looked at him and warbled questioningly. _With what?_

"Okay, so me and Alena are dating, right?" Shade nodded. "So, I had an idea for a possible date for us, but I need your help with it. Is that saddle Matt was working on done?"

Shade thought for a moment, and then raised his paw and tilted it side to side in the universal gesture that meant _sort of_.

"What do you mean, 'sort of'?" Ben asked. "Has he not tested it yet or something?"

Shade nodded.

"Ohâ€¦ okay," said Ben. "That might be an inconvenience, but I think we can go on without it. Anyway, I want to take her flying. With you."

Shade looked taken aback. He hadn't expected such a request.

"If you help us, I'll be the test subject for the saddle," he said. "I'll test it as many times as you or Matt want."

Shade considered Ben a good friend of his, and the deal he had proposed was a good one. He nodded, and grinned. _I'll do it._

Ben smiled. He hadn't understood exactly what Shade had said, but he knew what it meant. "Thanks, man," he said. "So, ummâ€¦ is this afternoon okay? Around sunset?"

Shade nodded.

"Alright, cool." He raised his fist and Shade, on cue, raised his paw, curled it into what best resembled a fist to him, and the two met each other in a knuckle-knock.

"So where is Matt?" he asked. "I want to talk to him about the saddle testing."

Shade stood on all four of his legs and walked towards the door. He motioned for Ben to open it, and the human did as he was told. Then, the dragon squeezed his way through and motioned for Ben to follow.

Ben did, and the dragon walked over to Ashmore. The two dragons exchanged a few words- none of which Ben understood- and then Shade walked towards the front door.

"So I take it he's not here," said Ben. Shade stopped, shook his head, and then motioned from Ben to the door.

"Right," said Ben. "You should consider getting some thumbs." As he went to open the door, he felt the dragon's tail thump him in the back playfully.

He opened the door and they both exited the house. Once they were outside, and Ben had closed the door behind him, Shade crouched to the ground, and motioned for Ben to climb onto his back.

"Oh, we're gonna fly?" he asked. "Sweet!" He mounted the dragon, and got into a position comfortable for the both of them. Then, Shade ran down the street and jumped into the air. With a few flaps of his wings, they were airborne.

"Oh my God!" Ben yelled. "I forgot how awesome this was!"

Shade glanced back at him and grinned, and then looked forward again and banked sharply to the left, changing their course.

A few minutes later, they arrived at Matt's house. At first, it seemed deserted, but then Ben heard the telltale thump of music. Someone was definitely home.

Shade landed in the driveway, and Ben slid off of his back. The two of them walked to the front door and Ben, upon finding it unlocked, opened it. They entered the house, closed the front door, and followed the sound of the music up the stairs.

The noise was coming from Matt's room. He, Sam and Samantha were crouched over his desk reading diagrams. Next to them was a portable

radio with his iPod hooked up to it blasting the song "Death or Sovngarde" by Jeremy Soule.

"So this is what you built?" asked Sam.

Matt nodded. "It wasn't until after I built it that I thought to ask you guys. Basically I made some diagrams of Toothless's saddle from the movie and matched up parts of that to the horse saddle Shade found. Then I added some things to the diagram, built the actual saddle, and then fitted it to Shade. It fits well, but I'm not sure it's going to work." He turned to Samantha, who was standing to his right. "You're the expert on this stuff, what do you think?"

She nodded. "I think you did a good job," she complimented. "Theoretically, this should work. We'd need a test subject though."

Ben walked into the room. They were so absorbed in their work (and the music was so loud), that they didn't even notice. He walked up behind them and looked at the diagrams. They depicted a sketch of a Night Fury and several sketches of a saddle modified to work on dragons.

"Didn't the one in the movie have a part that attached to his tail?" he asked.

Sam turned to him, and jumped a little bit. "Jeez!" he said. "Don't sneak up on us like that, Ben!"

"Where the hell did you come from?" asked Matt.

"Shade flew me here," he said. "And the front door was open."

Matt looked behind him and saw Shade. "Oh! Okay!" he said. "Well, sit down. Both of you!"

Ben sat down on the bed and Shade sat on his hind legs in the middle of the room. "So, you didn't answer my question," he said. "Wasn't there a part that attached to the tail?"

"That was special for Toothless," Sam explained. "He was missing a tail fin. As of now, Shade still has both of his. Hopefully he always will."

"Ohhhh yeah," Ben remembered. "That's right. I forgot."

Samantha gave him a strange look. "How do you remember what his saddle looked like but not remember he was missing a tail fin?"

Ben shrugged. "I don't know," he confessed. "My memory's weird sometimes. I used to hit my head a lot back when I longboarded."

Matt turned around in his chair to face him. "So what's up?" he asked.

"Well, me and Shade made a deal," he explained. "I want to take Alena flying on him for a date. He's gonna help, but in return I said I'd test your saddle for you."

Matt, Sam and Samantha looked at each other. "Well, that solves that problem," Sam observed.

They moved shop outside to test the saddle. Even though Ben knew it could be dangerous, he did it anyway. He was lucky; the saddle worked. They sent him and Shade flying three times, just to be sure, but by the end of the third flight, it was clear that they had created a working design.

Sam took the diagrams that Matt had made to create his own saddle for Ashmore. Ben, having held up his end of the bargain, was now free to make plans with Shade and Alena.

He told Shade his plan, and the dragon agreed to it. Then, he went to go find Alena.

When he found her, he invited her on an excursion much simpler than the one he had planned: a short hike up Rockrimmon Hill to watch the sunset from the top. She agreed to go, and when it was time to go, they drove to the base of the trail.

The two had a lovely hike, no matter how short it might have been. And when they were nearing the end, just as the top was about to come into view, Ben decided to play around before his surprise was revealed.

"Oh," he said, as if remembering something important. "I invited a friend to join us."

Alena looked at him, and Ben could see the disappointment in her eyes. "Oh," she said, crestfallen. "That's okay, I guess."

"I know you probably wanted to be alone, but trust me. We're not here _just_ to watch the sunset."

Alena frowned in suspicion. "What are we doing then?" She stopped suddenly, as what awaited them at the top of the hill was revealed to them.

Shade was sitting on the far side of the hilltop, waiting for them. The dragon saddle was strapped on, and he was ready to go.

Behind him, the sky was colored a deep, orange-pink color. That, combined with the stretching landscape below, created a beautiful view. Sunset was here, right on cue.

Perfect timing, Ben thought, smiling to himself.

"Oh my God," said Alena. "Does this mean what I think it means?"

Ben nodded. "Alena," he began, dropping to his knees. "Will you go flying with me?"

Alena laughed. "Sure," she said. She and Ben approached Shade. "Hey Shade," Alena greeted. The Night Fury nodded in return. He then crouched, making it easier for them to mount him.

Ben climbed onto his back. "Alright," he said as he began to strap himself in to the saddle. "One more time, buddy."

Shade looked back at him, an amused glint in his eyes. Then, when Ben was strapped in, he warbled at Alena, signaling that it was her turn to get on. Ben helped her up, and clipped a strap into the belt loops of the blue jeans she was wearing. Just like that, they were ready.

"Let's go, Shade!" Ben exclaimed.

The Night Fury warbled happily, and took off at a run.

'Oh God," said Alena as he picked up speed. "I've never flown on him before!" Her sentence was cut off with a scream as Shade jumped into the air. He gave his wings a few flaps, and they were off. The ground shrank at an alarmingly fast rate, as the dragon quickly ascended. Alena screamed and closed her eyes. Ben held her to give her a greater sense of safety- although, to tell the truth, she was fairly safe. Even if she did fall off, Ben had full confidence that Shade could catch her.

"Just relax," he told her. "You'll be fine. Just take a deep breath and enjoy it."

Alena followed his advice, and breathed deeply. Then, she opened her eyes. It took several moments for her to get fully acclimatized, but once she did, she made it clear.

"Ohâ€¦ my God!" she yelled ecstatically. "You're right!" They both yelled in excitement, enjoying the ultimate thrill ride that was dragon riding.

Shade listened to the humans' shouts with amusement. He was almost at his target altitude. _How about I give them a little surprise?_ he thought mischievously.

When he reached the height he was striving for, he steadied out his flight path to maintain his altitude. He gave the humans on his back just enough time to get used to the peace and relaxation of steady flight. Then, he dove.

They were taken completely by surprise. "Holy shit!" Ben yelled. Alena produced a scream louder than Ben thought the human voice was capable of making.

They held on for their lives as Shade dove straight down. The ground was getting closer at a frightening rate, and if he hadn't known that Shade was just teasing them, Ben would have feared for his life.

After a few more seconds, Shade decided that he'd had enough fun. He pulled up out of his dive, and felt the humans grip him even harder as they were jolted back upward.

Once he returned to his ascent, the humans tried to calm themselves down. Once her terror had passed, Alena slapped Shade's neck. "Don't do that again!" she scolded.

Shade laughed. _Worth it_, he thought.

He reached his preferred cruising altitude again, and then decided to let them have their peace. And peace it was. Now that the terror and

anxiety had passed, they could now see just how beautiful flying on a dragon could be. Especially at sunset. Shade slowed his pace and let himself glide slowly but gracefully through the sky, occasionally flapping his wings gently.

Alena and Ben stared, transfixed, at the sky around them. It felt like a whole new world. The sunset had painted the canvas of the sky into an abstract blend of countless different oranges, pinks, reds, yellows, blues and purples. The clouds that drifted by seemed like islands in the ever-expanding sea of the sky. The sight was beyond beautiful; it was downright spiritual.

Shade began to turn and twist gracefully through the clouds, taking the humans along for the ride. Flying through the skyscape on top of the dragon's back, Ben and Alena felt more at peace than they had in months.

For a while longer, Shade continued his flight. He felt these pleasant emotions radiating from them, and grinned to himself; he had done his job.

When the sun had fully set, and they were flying in the dark, Shade made his way back to the hill. They followed the trail back to where it opened into Matt's neighborhood, and landed next to Ben's Mazda.

Ben unclipped the straps holding them into the saddle. The two of them slid off of the dragon. Once he was on the ground, Ben turned to Shade. "Thank you for doing this for us," he said. "Now let's get this thing off of youâ€¦"

He knelt down and unfastened the buckles and straps of the saddle. Once it was done, he slipped it off and tossed it into the back of his car. "I'll stop by Matt's house to give this to him," he explained. He patted Shade on the shoulder. "Thanks again, dude."

The Night Fury turned to him and warbled happily. _You're welcome._

Alena walked up to him next, and she rested her hand on his shoulder. She stared into his eyes and said, "You are amazing." She pressed into him and wrapped her arms around him in an embrace. "Thank you."

She held it for several more seconds. Finally, Ben made an exaggerated coughing noise to remind him that he was still there. Alena let go of Shade, and smiled at him. The dragon grinned back.

Ben got into the front seat and waved at Shade one more time. Alena got into the seat next to him, and Shade took off, flying back towards Sam's house.

The two of them sat there, contemplating what they had just been through.

"So, uhâ€¦ If you two wanna get a room next timeâ€¦" Ben joked

Alena punched him lightly on the shoulder. "Fuck you," she cursed

playfully.

"What?" Ben complained. "I'm sorry but that was a long ass hug!"

"Just shut up and kiss me," Alena commanded. She grabbed his shirt and pulled his lips towards hers.

"Oh, you mean _that _kind of fuck," said Ben, right as their lips met. The kiss was more passionate than any they had shared before, and before long, both of them knew what was going to happen.

Ben broke the kiss to ask a single question. "Your place or mine?" he asked.

After it was done, they sat in Ben's kitchen, drinking.

"So why didn't we just stay up there again?" asked Alena. "It was comfortable."

"Oh yeah it wasâ€¦" Ben said, remembering what had just happened with a moronic smile on his face. Then, he realized that he had been asked a question, and snapped back into reality. "Well, if Anthony came back and found us like thatâ€¦ let's just say we'd never hear the end of it."

Alena nodded, and took a swig. They sat in silence for a minute, until Ben finally broke it.

"This feels weird for me," he said.

Alena frowned. "Gee, thanks," she said.

Ben shook his head and held out his hand. "That's not what I meant," he said. "It justâ€¦ It almost feels like I'm going too fast with this."

"Oh please tell me you're not breaking up with me," Alena said threateningly.

"No!" Ben exclaimed. "Hell no. Butâ€¦ I'm still feeling bad about what happened last timeâ€¦"

Alena's expression changed from one of dread to one of concern. "What happened?" she asked.

Ben took another swig. "She died," he said. He felt his eyes begin to water. "The zombies got her on Z-Day. It was my fault."

Alena didn't know what to say. "Iâ€¦ I'm sorry," she finally got out.

Ben nodded. "So am I," he said.

"What happened?" she asked.

Ben stiffened. Sensing this, she said, "I'm sorry. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"No. I do." He then told her everything that had happened, from his

escape from the school to the one-man funeral he had held for Katie.

Alena was silent. "Listen," she said. "No matter what, this is not your fault."

"How is it not my fault?" he asked. "If I hadn't locked the fucking car, she'd still be alive. That's on me, simple as that!"

"How were you supposed to know what would happen?" she asked. "You have to stop beating yourself up about that. Even if it is your fault, you have to forgive yourself."

"I can't," Ben replied. "I just can't."

"You have to."

They sat in silence again, until finally Alena said something.

"I want to tell you something," she said. "I want to tell you my past."

Ben looked at her, intrigued. "Are you sure?" he asked.

Alena nodded. "Yeah," she said. "I have to tell someone. I realize that now. And who better to tell than my boyfriend?"

Ben nodded. "Okay," he said. "Let's hear it."

She searched for the words in her head. "Wellâ€¦ when I was in 9th grade, I went to this party. I met this boy there, and he seemed really nice at the time, butâ€¦"

Ben thought he knew what was going to happen next. "What happened?" he asked.

"Heâ€¦ he forced himself on me," she said.

Rage filled Ben as his suspicions were confirmed. But he knew that the story wasn't over yet.

"What did you do?" he asked.

Alena's eyes began to water. "I went right home. My parents caught me coming in. I was drunk, and they got mad at me. I tried to tell them what happened butâ€¦" She trailed off.

Ben didn't want to force her, so he let her complete the thought on her own time.

"You know, me and my parents never got along," Alena remembered. "They practically worshipped my older sister. Whenever they looked at me, they just seemedâ€¦ disappointed."

"Anyway, when I told them, they didn't believe me. They thought I was just trying to get out of trouble by winning over their sympathy. They grounded me for a whole month."

Alena paused for a moment, her lips quivering. She was about to cry. "I wanted to kill myself that night," she confessed. "I almost did,

actually. But at the last second, I changed my mind.

"That wasn't the end of it, though. The next week at school, the boy who did it cornered me in the bathroom and tried to do it again. Only this time, I fended him off. I kicked his ass right there and then. It felt greatâ€¦ But the consequences didn't."

What did he do?" asked Ben.

Alena sniffed back the tears as if she'd done it a million times before. "He was mad, obviously. He was a pig, and like all pigs he thought I ought to be his. When it was clear that I wasn't, he got mad.

"He and his friends started bullying me. It started with just them, but eventually others started joining in. By the end of that year, half the school was bullying me. They started spreading rumors, _horrible _rumors. One by one, I lost all of my old friends, either because they were preppy bitches who couldn't be seen with anyone who wasn't popular, or because their parents wouldn't let them be friends with me. The only people who really didn't care about any of it were the kids most people considered 'the bad kids.' At the time, I just needed a friend, so I started to hang out with them.

"Eventually, only my best friend, Rebecca, was left. She was the only reason I didn't go all the way into the hole I was digging myself into. Looking back, the people I called my friendsâ€¦ They weren't great people. We did some really sketchy things. Rebecca was a good girl, though, and she tried to help me. I don't think she ever realized just how much she did.

"Things went like that for the rest of high school. Over time, I gradually went deeper into bad kid territory. I pretended I didn't care. I even pretended I liked it. But the truth isâ€¦ I hated the person I was becoming.

"2014 was senior year. I was excited. My whole high school career had been a living hell, and I just needed it to be over. But then, Z-Dayâ€¦ Everything changed. Everyone I knew was killed. My family, my 'friends'â€¦ All of them.

"The worst part was when we were trapped in the school. Me and Rebecca were trying to get out together, and we ended up trapped in a classroom with that _pig_. We tried to ignore our bad history just for that moment, to come up with a plan, butâ€¦ it didn't work.

"We got in a fight. He called me a slut, and accused me of enjoying it, and just complaining about it because I was a massive attention whore who couldn't live without all eyes being on me. I justâ€¦ snapped. I attacked him.

"And then, in a rage, he did something even _I _didn't think he was capable of. Heâ€¦" Alena couldn't take it anymore. She burst into tears.

"Heâ€¦ he threw Rebecca to the zombies!" she sobbed. "He killed her! My best friend!"

Ben wrapped his arms around her in comfort. Pure hate for this boy that in his mind could barely be considered a person filled

him.

"Tell me he got what was coming," Ben urged.

Alena took a deep breath and calmed herself down. She nodded. "I tracked him and his friends a few months later," she explained. "I found a trail and followed him. You know how I said I learned how to track from my dad? Wellâ€¦ that's not true. I taught myself on the job."

Ben nodded. "Good job," he said. "He deserved it."

Alena pressed herself against him, as more sobs wracked her body. When she finally calmed down, she finished her story.

"Something changed in me after that. I kind ofâ€¦ lost the will to live. I wasn't suicidal, exactly, but I just sort of drifted for a couple of weeks. I knew I would die if I kept on like that, but I didn't care.

"And then I met Samanthaâ€¦ I owe her more than I can say. She saved my life in more ways than one."

They sat there in silence, locked in a teary embrace.

"I don't know whyâ€¦" said Alena. "But ever since I met you, thisâ€¦ wall I've had around my mind has been crumbling down. And the weird thing isâ€¦ I don't even mind."

"Maybe it's part of letting go," Ben suggested. "Maybe it's part of moving on."

A few days later, yet another squad was sent into Gunnerville. This one consisted of Brian, Anthony, Jeremy and Ashmore. They were sent to look for any clues as to who the mysterious army that had taken Lucas was, and where they had gone. What they found wasn't nearly that informative- but it was a clue.

They had moved onto an area of Gunnerville Brian was reluctant to return to: the prison.

"Ugh, I hate this place," said Brian. "_Terrible_ memories. My face stillhurts!"

Jeremy grimaced. "Thank you for giving us an excuse to kill that bastard, by the way," he said. "Price was a horrible person. I don't think anyone liked him that much."

"Glad to be of service," said Brian. He then turned to Ashmore. "And you! How in the world did you manage to piss them off _that much_? They did that because they thought we were with you!"

Ashmore smiled proudly.

"Hey, I'm not complimenting you!" Brian said, laughing. "That was a serious question!"

Ashmore nodded. By this point, the humans were starting to get used to interpreting the dragons' body language. They took this to mean _I know_.

Brian waved a dismissing hand at him. "Screw you," he said humorously.

They continued their trek until they finally reached the prison. "The last time I was here, I was saving your ass, Brian," Jeremy recalled.

"Don't remind me," Brian replied.

"You know, you guys really taught me a valuable lesson with all of that," said Anthony.

"If you make a torture joke, I swear I will hurt you," said Brian.

"No, it's not that," said Anthony. "It's 'whenever you want a problem solved, sit on your ass and let someone else take care of it'."

Jeremy flipped him off.

"Of course, that's after they get beaten for information."

"Okay, you know what?" Brian asked, striding over to Anthony. "I oughtta-!"

"Guys!" Jeremy interrupted. "Something's up with Ash!"

The Night Fury was standing still and sniffing the air. A wonderful scent permeated his nostrils, but its presence was making him suspicious.

_What's fish doing here? _He thought.

The scent was coming from inside the prison. He followed it to the front door.

Brian saw it just in time. Spread over the top of the stairs Ashmore was ascending was a small, thin wire. At the same time, he realized that the front steps seemed bigger than they had before.

He took off running. "Ashmore!" he yelled.

The dragon was snapped out of his daze, and hesitated just long enough to save his life.

Brian, realizing Ashmore wouldn't stop in time, decided that the only way to save him was to tackle him aside. He jumped at the dragon, knocking him off balance. His paw accidentally snapped the wire, opening a pit just big enough for him to fall into.

Brian's tackle, however, was enough to knock him away from the pit and save his life. The two fell off the stairs onto the ground next to them.

Brian landed on top of Ashmore. He rolled off, stood up, and held a hand out to him. The dragon took it with his paw and Brian helped him to his feet. "Sorry about that," he said.

Ashmore nodded faintly, in a daze from his near-death experience.
It's okay.

The two of them walked over to the newly-made pit and looked into it. Anthony and Jeremy joined them.

"Holy shit," Anthony commented. "You're so lucky, Ash."

Ashmore nodded, his eyes wide with shock.

The hole opened into a large pit just big enough for a Night Fury to fit into. The bottom was lined with razor sharp spikes. There were also several fish scattered in between them. Now that the pit had opened, Ashmore could smell that they had gone bad long ago.

Ashmore turned to Brian, his blue eyes wide with gratitude, and gave him a small nudge. _You saved my life!_ is what the human read.
Thank you!

Brian patted him on the back. "Don't mention it," he said.

"Look," said Jeremy. "There's fish in there."

Brian frowned, looked into the pit, and saw them. "So there is," he observed. "But that makes no sense."

"Why not?" asked Anthony.

"Because this trap was obviously meant for Night Furies," Brian explained. "And when they captured us, they knew absolutely nothing about Shade."

"But yet they now know Night Furies like fish," Jeremy completed.

There was something else as well. This wasn't the first trap they had come across, but all the others had been crudely made, easy to spot, and often malfunctioned. But this one was much more professional, and Brian was sure that if he hadn't been keeping an eye out for traps, Ashmore would be lying dead in that pit.

He voiced his concerns to the others. "This one is so much more well-made than the others, tooâ€¦" He then thought of something else. "What ifâ€¦ what if the others were all made by Maverick's men, but this one was made by the army?"

"Maybe," said Jeremy. "But then, how do they know about Night Furies?"

"Maybe they're involved with the scientists," Anthony suggested.

They were all silent as they contemplated what that could mean. Brian glanced at Ashmore, and saw that he seemed very anxious at the idea.

Brian placed his hand reassuringly on the dragon's shoulder. "Hey, we won't let them get to you," he said. "As long as we have any say about it, you're never going back to those labs. And besides; they could've just visited a lab and found out about the fish that

way."

Ashmore looked at him gratefully, and Brian scratched under his chin the way he so loved.

"Alright, while you two are having your moment, me and Jeremy are gonna check this place out," said Anthony.

"Alright, alright, let's go."

They carefully reached around the pit and opened the door. Then, they made their way over the opening and into the prison.

"Feel good to be back?" asked Jeremy.

"Oh yes," Brian replied sarcastically. "Absolutely."

They split up into two groups. Brian and Anthony were going to check one half of the prison, while Jeremy and Ashmore took the other.

Brian and Anthony took the half with the storage closet that Brian had been tortured in. He was not looking forward to returning to that room. They investigated everywhere else first, but found nothing of importance, so they finally decided to search the torture room.

They opened the door, and almost immediately the sickening smell of death flooded out of the room.

Brian groaned in disgust. "Oh God, what happened in here?" he asked.

"It smells like something crawled in here and died under a black lamp on top of a pile of broccoli and fried chicken," Anthony complained.

"That was a wonderful image," Brian commented. He pulled a small flashlight out of his pocket and turned it on. The beam jumped from the end and illuminated a shriveled corpse strapped into the torture chair. Black, congealed blood crusted over the wall behind him, and a large bullet hole was present in his forehead.

"Oh Jesus," said Brian. "That is disgusting!"

He and Anthony walked into the room, covering their noses with their shirts. "Poor bastard," said Anthony. "I wonder what he did to piss them off this much."

Brian caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye. On the table where the torturer usually kept his tools was a huge, thick leather-bound book.

Brian picked it up and opened it, glancing at the first few pages. "It's a journal," he announced.

"Think it's his?" Anthony asked.

"Maybe," Brian replied. "Let's get out of here so I can actually focus on this. I'm gonna throw up if I have to stay in here any longer."

They left the room for the hallway and closed the door behind them. Brian took a deep breath of fresh air. "Thank God," he said. "Okay, let's take a look at this." He opened the book and read.

Almost immediately, he realized that he would have to go to the back of the book. "This is all from Before," he observed. He came to the second half of the book and found the entries written during and after Z-Day. And eventually, he found information on Carlton and his soldiers.

"Wow," Brian commented. "This guy really liked to write."

"What's it say?" asked Anthony.

"A lot. Everything this guy knew and thought about these people is in here. It's really detailed." He closed the book. "I say we take it back and look through it. This could be the clue we've been looking for."

"Let's do it," Anthony agreed.

They heard the sound of footsteps walking down the hallway. Looking up, they saw Jeremy and Ashmore walking towards them.

"Hey!" Brian greeted. "Find anything?"

"A couple of dead bodies in the cells," Jeremy replied. "Other than that, no. How about you?"

Brian smiled and showed them the book. "I think we might have finally found what we've been looking for."

Brian brought the book back to Trent, along with the news of the possibility that the army was connected to the labs. Trent agreed to take a look through, but between finishing yet another desperate sweep through the flash drive and his other duties, it took him a while. In fact, he would not find anything of use for another week or so.

In the meantime, other things happened as well. One day, Matt and Shade had nothing really to do, so they decided to visit Sam and Ashmore. When they arrived, they knocked on the door, and heard a call from Sam telling them to come in.

Matt opened the door and he and Shade stepped into the house. Closing the door behind him, he looked around for Sam but couldn't find see him anywhere.

"Hello?" he called.

"Up here!" A muffled voice called from upstairs. From the sound of it, Matt determined that it was coming from Sam's bedroom.

The two of them made their way to the staircase on the far side of the house and walked up it. What they saw when they entered was a very eccentric sight indeed.

In the middle of the room, Sam and Ashmore were lying on their stomachs facing each other. Sam held a DS in his hand, and was

playing Pok  mon. As for Ashmore  

He was playing Pok  mon as well.

On the floor in front of him was a strange device that looked like a cross between an iPad and a 3DS. The buttons and screens were much bigger than that of a regular 3DS, allowing him to press them with his claws.

"Okay, now select the Pok  mon you want to use," Sam instructed. "Remember what I told you about types."

Sam was currently using his shiny Reuniclus. Ashmore, after some thinking, selected a Gengar.

Sam grinned. He chose his move, as did Ashmore. Naturally, the Gengar out sped the Reuniclus and used Shadow Ball. The move inflicted massive damage on the Reuniclus. But the Reuniclus's massive defenses allowed it to just barely take the hit. Sam then used Psychic on the Gengar. It was super effective, and the Gengar fainted.

Ashmore growled in frustration, and stared at Sam accusingly.

"I told you before; Gengar is a ghost type, and ghost types aren't weak to psychic, but he's also a _poison_ type. Poison types are."

Ashmore huffed and looked back to the modified DS.

"What the hell is going on?" Matt asked.

"I'm teaching Ash how to play Pok  mon," Sam explained.

"Yeah, I can see that, but   Why? You have _real_ Pok  mon. Why do you need to play the game?"

Sam shrugged. "Why not?"

Matt and Shade sat down and watched the rest of the battle. Ashmore finally managed to take out a couple of Sam's other Pok  mon, but ultimately, he was defeated.

"You did well," Sam complimented. "You just need practice, that's all."

"How?" Matt asked. "You're a horrible practice partner! How's he supposed to learn if he just gets his ass kicked every time?"

"He could play the main game," Sam suggested.

"Yes, but that only helps you so much  " Matt trailed off, trying to think of something else. "What he really needs is someone on the same level as him. Problem is, everyone in this group is either too good or doesn't play."

"Hmmm  " Sam mused. Suddenly, they both thought of something. Their eyes met.

And then turned to Shade.

"Hey, Shade," said Matt. "Do you want to learn how to play?"

Shade glanced at Ashmore. "Should I?" he asked. "You seemed a little frustrated at it."

Ashmore nodded. "It's complicated, but it seems like it'd be a fun little game once we get past that. I don't see how it could hurt."

Shade agreed to learn. Sam gave him another one of the modified DS's- which he explained had been designed by Samantha for the Night Furies' use- and they got to work on teaching him to play.

First, they explained the basic mechanics of the game. They explained the battling system, focusing heavily on moves and types. Then, Sam donated him some Pok  mon from his team. Once he had done that, they set the two dragons up to battle.

As the Night Furies began their fight, footsteps came up the stairs. Matt and Sam looked up to see Ben enter the room. "Hey have you seen  " he trailed off and stared at the sight that lay before him. Matt and Sam waited for him to say something. As he opened his mouth, they braced themselves, only to be surprised as he shook his head and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Without a word, he retreated back down the stairs. When he reached the bottom, they heard him yell, "Anthony! I thought we agreed, no more LSD!"

Matt and Sam looked at each other and burst into laughter.

Shade and Ashmore had a long battle. It was made even longer by the fact that they were both new, and Matt and Sam had to frequently assist them and give them advice. But by the time they were done with the battle, they seemed to have gotten the hang of it.

"Well, what do you say?" Matt asked his reptilian friend. "You like it?"

Shade nodded. It wasn't _too_ enthusiastic, but it was a nod either way. That was enough for Matt and Sam.

"How about we teach them to play the main game?" asked Matt.

Sam grinned. "Let's do it."

Over the next couple hours, they taught the dragons how to play the game. The dragons, despite being unused to playing video games, managed to get the hang of it pretty quickly. Both dragons chose Snivy as their starters, as their humans suggested. They each got as far as the first gym leader before they grew tired of it.

"I like it and all," Shade said to Ashmore. "I just need a break."

"Yeah," Ashmore agreed. "Although it is a fun game. Maybe not something I'd do all the time, like Sam does, but I definitely like it."

Shade felt the same way. It wasn't surprising; they were dragons.

They'd rather go flying than play video games. But that didn't mean they couldn't enjoy them.

It had been late afternoon when they had started playing, and it was now dark out. That was when Matt had an idea.

"Sam, there's something I've been putting off for way too long. Could you help me with it?"

"Sure," said Sam. "What is it?"

"I want to watch How to Train Your Dragon. With you, Shade, and Ashmore."

Sam smiled. "Okay," he said. "I'll go get the generator. You go get everyone together, and we'll get it set up."

Matt did as he was told. Ashmore supported him in getting Shade to watch it, and with both of his best friends pressuring him, Shade gave in. He had a desire to watch it anyway, from what Matt had told him.

He had seen a movie once before. On a stormy night in Virginia, he and Matt had been stuck inside. Matt had found a portable DVD player and television with just enough juice left to watch a movie, and the two had watched Inception together. Shade had enjoyed it. Like video games, it wasn't his favorite, but he still liked the concept.

But he knew he would like this one more. This one involved other dragons.

Sam hooked up the generator, and Matt found the Blu-Ray and popped it into the player. As the main menu popped up, everyone was sitting either on the ground or on a couch. At around the same time, some of Sam's Pokémon showed up. Most of them were uninterested in watching, but Jack and Swampert decided to accompany them.

From the opening menu alone, Shade knew that he would like this movie better than Inception. While Inception had had a great story, he knew he would be able to relate to this one a lot more. Mostly because he was a Night Fury, as was one of the main characters of this movie.

The images in the film were artificial and computerized. Shade found it odd. Matt had warned him of this, however, so he would get over it. After all, it was almost life-like.

For the first ten minutes, Shade enjoyed the movie, although not as much as he was expecting. It was a fun, adventurous story, but not the amazing work of art Sam, Matt and Ashmore had made it out to be.

Until Toothless came in, that was.

Once the Night Fury came in, he knew it would be a great experience. Once he learned that Toothless had lost his tail fin, he was even more into it. Being a Night Fury, he knew how important tail fins were, and he felt an unbearable amount of sorrow for the poor fellow dragon.

"Imagine how awful that must be," he said to Ashmore. "To have freedom so close, but to not be able to fly"

The film went on. Once they reached the scene where Hiccup befriended Toothless, Shade was completely lost in the movie. He remained this way its entirety, from the friendship scenes between Hiccup, the main character, and Toothless, to the dragon training, and especially at the climactic battle.

His favorite part about the movie was the Night Fury, Toothless. But the story was also wonderful, and what really interested him outside of that were the other dragons. He had never really stopped to think what dragons that weren't Night Furies could look like. Now that he knew, he realized how cool they could be.

Not all of it was good though. The eels were horrible.

Once the film was over, he turned to Ashmore. "Wow" he said. "That was beautiful."

"I know, right?" asked Ashmore. "Most movies, in my opinion, are just okay, but that one I mean, part of it is because we can relate to it, but still They did a really good job."

"Thank you so much for showing that to me," Shade said to him. "And to you two as well," he said to Sam and Matt.

Matt smiled. "I see you liked it. You're welcome," he said.

That was when Shade realized what Ben and Alena had realized before him. This had been a great day. Every day since they had settled in Lyndrich had been great. And up investigating that realization, he came to another one.

For the first time in his life, he felt like things were truly getting better.

On the second to last day of those two weeks, one more notable event occurred in the deserted town of Gunnerville.

Yet another patrol had been sent out. This one consisted of Kody, Alex, Swampert and Lily.

There were only two places left to search; the town hall and the warehouse Shade had been imprisoned in. In order to get it done in a shorter amount of time, they decided to split up. Alex and Kody took the town hall, while Swampert and Lily took the warehouse.

As the two Pokémon walked, they began to talk about the past days.

"Weird couple of weeks these have been," Lily commented.

"I'll say," Swampert agreed. "It's nice to have more company, though. They seem to be doing well here."

"Yeah," Lily agreed. "It's weird, though I'm used to being able to talk to everyone. I mean, we could never really 'talk' to Sam, but he was good at understanding us." Lily chuckled and continued, "I mean,

there's Shade, but I feel like he can barely talk to me sometimes. My eel DNA just unnerves him _that much_."

Swampert grinned and shook his head. "Freakin' Night Furies, I'm telling you. You know, I think they must be able to smell my fish DNA or something, because whenever I'm around, they're _always hungry_."

Lily laughed. "Yeah," she agreed. "They're nice, though. The humans are too."

Swampert nodded. "Definitely," he agreed. "Even the ones who drugged everyone."

While everyone had been mad, the Pok  mon had been furious. Ashmore could've died because of Ben, Anthony and Gengar. It had taken all of Reuniclus's strength to prevent them from beating the ghost to a pulp. Sam had very clearly and crudely voiced their concerns to Ben and Anthony as well. Needless to say, they were confident that it wouldn't happen again. Most of them had forgiven the perpetrators, however the incident had not been forgotten. Elizabeth and Gengar bickered now more than ever.

Despite these things, the Pok  mon and the humans were getting along fabulously. Certain friendships had been formed between the two groups. For instance, Alena and Elizabeth seemed to get along extremely well. Ben and Gengar had seemed to form a bond, and Matt, Samantha, Joey and Brian got along with pretty much all of them. Samantha especially.

"I'm glad they joined us," said Lily. "Sam needed some more human friends, and Ashmore needed Shade. Plus, they really make things easier around here."

Swampert laughed. "You've got that right!" he exclaimed. "We had to go get everything! I think we maybe got five minutes of free time day a day. But now  !"

"The one other thing that's a little weird, though, is that everyone seems to have known each other Before. I mean, as long as I've known, we've been Sam's only friends. Same with Ashmore. But now, they have all of these people that they've been friends with for so much longer than we've even been alive. I don't feel jealous or anything   but it just feels weird, you know? It's hard to explain."

Swampert nodded. "I know," he said.

"Plus it's weird to be around so many people who were born naturally  " Lily continued. "I think about that sometimes, too. I know Sam sometimes worries about us. About whether or not we're okay with how we were brought to life. Personally, I've made my peace with the fact for the most part. But I still can't help but wonder sometimes what it would be like..."

"I know what you're saying," said Swampert. "But you have to remember one thing. If it wasn't for that, we wouldn't have been born at all. I sometimes wonder what it would've been like as well, but I never let it get to me. Because if it wasn't for that, we'd never have gotten the chance to be part of Sam's plan, and our species wouldn't even have a chance. And honestly, even though our little family isn't

exactly normal, I wouldn't have it any other way."

Lily nodded. If she'd had lips, she would've grinned. "Yeah," she agreed. "You're right. You're completely right."

As they walked along, however, something else popped into the spider's head. She turned to Swampert and asked, "I thought Sam's 'operation' was broken? Isn't that why he was so mad when they killed GLaDOS? Heck, isn't that why we put up with her in the first place? I mean, even _Gengar_ agreed that she was completely psychotic!"

Swampert stopped and looked at her. "You saw what Sam was willing to do to get to his goal. He let himself get involved with GLaDOS. He sent two humans to what should have been their deaths. Hell, he left Shade, a _Night Fury_, a creature of which there are only a few left alive, and a species that he loves more than his own, to die! He knew fully well what he was doing, too. You saw him after that; he was scary! He wouldn't sleep; he'd stay up all night just sitting there! His guilt was driving him insane, I could see it! And it didn't help that Ashmore wouldn't even talk to him after that! In fact, if things hadn't turned out the way they did, Sam would've changed. And I doubt we'd like who he would've changed into. And who knows if Ashmore would even be with us! I can't even begin to tell you how relieved I was when those two made up! They're so much better now, it's like-

"Swampert. You're rambling," Lily interrupted. "I know all this. What's your point?"

"Sorry," said Swampert. "Anyway, my point is, if he was willing to go through all of that, do you really think he'd give up just because we lost our workplace?"

Lily thought about it. His reasoning made sense to her.

"Aperture wasn't the only lab," Swampert explained. "There are others. Once we're done dealing with this army, and Trent's search, he's gonna find one. And we're gonna continue the operation."

"Do you really think we can do it?" asked Lily. "Do you really think we can create a whole new world? One with Pok mon, dragons and humans living as equals?"

"To tell the truth, I don't know," Swampert replied. "It's a huge feat. But  I trust Sam. I believe if anyone can do it, he can."

Lily considered this. "I'll tell you one thing. I hope we succeed. Being created rather than born; that's something I can handle. But dying, and knowing my kind will never get a chance, that  I don't know if I could handle that."

"Well  You wouldn't really have a chance to try, would you?" asked Swampert.

"Shut up. You know what I mean."

They continued walking together until they reached the warehouse. "So this is where they kept Shade, huh?" he commented. I've gotta admit,

I was expecting a lot more." He shrugged. "Oh well. Let's get this done so we can go home."

They approached the doors and Swampert opened them. Inside, there were no windows, so it was pitch black.

"Hey, think you could give me some light?" he asked.

Lily nodded. _I wonderâ€|_ she thought. She walked around the side of the building and saw the location where electrical wires would connect to the building. There were none attached at the moment. The spot was close to the roof of the building, but that was no problem for her. The spider easily crawled up the wall.

Here we go, she thought as she reached her destination. She stuck one of her legs into the spot and began to charge her electrical power. As she let it out, a blue glow emerged from her body. She could feel it pulse through her, as it went into the building.

"Alright, it's working! Thanks!" she heard Swampert yell. "Just hold up there for a second!"

She waited for minutes, powering the building. Just as she was getting tired, she heard Swampert yell, "Okay! We're good!"

Lily stopped producing electricity and climbed back to the ground. The spider then skittered over to meet Swampert. "Find anything?" she asked.

"Oh yeah," Swampert nodded. "The whole place is filled to the brim with generators. I'm no expert, but they looked like they were in good working condition, too."

Lily was suspicious. "What's the catch?" she asked. "There's gotta be one."

"Ay. There is. I almost died in there. It's armed to the teeth with traps. The _whole place_ is basically one big trap."

Lily wasn't in the slightest bit surprised. "We should go tell the others, though," she suggested.

"Yeah," Swampert agreed. "If those work, and we can find a way through the traps, they could be incredibly useful."

They turned back in the direction that they had come from. Without any warning, Lily rushed ahead of Swampert. "Race you there!" she yelled back to him.

Swampert ran after her. "Hey! No fair!" he yelled. "We all know you're faster than me!"

41. Chapter Forty: Zombieland

So, here's the first chapter of my two-part upload this weekend! It actually worked out pretty well, because these chapters go together.

****Anyway, I've taken a break the last ten chapters or so to focus more on characters and their development. These two chapters mark an event that gets the story back on track. Anyway, I hope you enjoy it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter Forty:

****Zombieland****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Happiness is a fragile thing.

One by one, almost everyone in the group had found the closest thing to happiness any of them had had since before Z-Day. They could be happy in Lyndrich, and they knew that once the threat from the strange army had passed, they could live a full life here.

But, as you well know, nothing lasts forever.

Happiness is a fragile thing, much like glass. When it falls, it breaks. And when it breaks, it shatters. All that is required is something to push it off the edge.

The patrol returned from Gunnerville, bringing news of the generators with them. The group quickly decided to retrieve them. The next day, they sent a patrol comprised of Matt, Shade, Sam, Ashmore, Alex, Ben, Swampert, Jack, Reuniclus, Gengar, Evan, Andrew and Anthony. The first thing that they did was travel via dragon and car to a highway. There they found a massive Wal-Mart 18-wheeler, emptied all of its pre-Z-Day cargo, and then drove it back to Gunnerville.

They parked the truck in front of the warehouse and got to work on the generators. Gengar, Jack and Reuniclus began disarming the traps—or, in Gengar's case, merely rendering them harmless. After that was done, the others loaded the generators onto the truck.

After an hour or two, they were finally done. Ben drove them to the Lyndrich town hall, while everyone else congregated at Sam's house to decide what to do with them.

On his way there, Matt had an idea. He told it to Shade, who had no objections, and then when they landed, relayed it to Ben. He loved it.

They explained it to the others.

"So let me get this straight," said Andrew. "You want to use those generators to power Canobie Lake Park?"

Canobie Lake Park was an amusement park in a town near Lyndrich. It was small, but it was the closest one they had, and for its size it was quite a fun place.

Ben nodded. "Yep," he said.

At first, some of them were hesitant. It seemed risky and difficult. "I mean, Ben supports it, which almost automatically makes it a bad idea," Joey explained.

"Hey!" Ben protested. "I've had _some_ good ideas!"

"Name two."

"Uhhhhâ€¦| Let me get back to you on that."

However, they eventually caved. They needed a day of pure, sober fun. So with that in mind, they developed a plan of action.

The next day, yet another party was sent out. Only this time, they went to Salem, where Canobie Lake Park was located. As far as they could tell, it was both in working condition and zombie free.

The party returned with the news, which was accepted with much rejoicing. Then, they formed their plan.

The next day, everybody but Swampert, Lily and Jack (who couldn't really do anything there so instead volunteered to stay on guard duty) got together. They all boarded their various modes of transportation; some inside the truck, others on the backs of the dragons. For protection, they brought their guns and other weapons, and the four remaining doses of the cure, which they combined together in one glass container. They all hoped that they wouldn't have to use them.

Upon arrival, they found the park's main power system and attached several generators to it. They also found a stash of propane and used it to fuel them. Finally, they were ready, and transferred power to the park.

The place roared to life. Lights came on, and the familiar John Williams music began to play at the main entrance. They quickly shut it off to avoid attracting zombies.

"Alright," said Nick. "Let's do this."

The first thing they did was go straight to the Extreme Frisbee. They always went on that ride first. Even those who normally avoided thrill rides like the plague were coerced to go on- after all, it might be their last chance ever.

There were only four that didn't go on. Shade and Ashmore, who were much too big to fit in the seats, and probably wouldn't enjoy it much anyway, decided to fly together. Gengar was nowhere to be seen- which made most of the group nervous- and Reuniclus was using her telekinesis to operate it.

Once everyone was strapped in, she started the ride. The large, circular disc, in which everyone was strapped into facing inward, began to turn slowly and move to the left. It reached its height, came back down and then went to the other side like a pendulum. It continued like this and the platform began to spin faster and faster. And it slowly got higher and higher. The riders began to scream in anticipation. Finally, it reached the highest it was supposed to go.

And then it kept going.

"What the hell?" asked Joey. "This isn't supposed to happen!"

Others echoed his concerns. Reuniclus tried to stop the ride, but it kept going. It swung higher and higher, until finally, it flipped over the top.

The group screamed in a confusing mixture of terror and exhilaration. They had no idea what was happening, but they knew it was wrong.

The platform came down on the other side, and they finally felt it begin to slow down. They almost flipped over again, but they had lost too much momentum, and came back down.

When the ride finally came to a stop, Gengar materialized at the top of the pole in the center, which connected it to the ride's mechanisms. He was grinning deviously.

"Motherfucker!" Andrew yelled. "I almost shit myself, I was so scared!"

Gengar laughed and disappeared. Reuniclus released them from their seats and they ran off of the ride before the ghost could do anything else.

The day continued like that. After riding the Extreme Frisbee, the group split up to wander around the park. Alex, Nick and Evan were currently en route to the Wipeout. On their way, they found something.

"Damn," said Nick. "What do you think happened to them?"

They were looking at a group of four skeletons strewn across one of the main eating areas of the park. From the look of them, they were a few months old.

"They alerted the horde, most likely," said Alex. "Poor bastards. Doesn't look like there are any zombies here now, though."

"It better stay that way," said Nick.

"Dead things," Evan observed.

They salvaged some ammo from the bodies, and then proceeded to the ride. They argued over who was going to operate it, and eventually, the issue was settled by a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Alex lost, and Nick and Evan boarded the ride. They lowered the lap bars and Alex started it up.

The whole ride was a large, circular contraption, with seats facing each other along the sides. They sat facing each other, as the ride began to spin. It got faster and faster, and Nick and Evan were having a ball. Then, suddenly, the ride began to tilt. When it reached its height, the spinning was accompanied by a bouncing sensation, created by the rise and fall of the rotating disk.

"Whooooo!" Nick yelled.

"Yay," said Evan calmly.

The force generated by the ride began to press them into the side. Nick knew what was coming, and prepared himself mentally for it. The ride began to lower itself back to its original angle, but only began to spin faster. The force increased with it, almost crushing them against the side of the seat. It hurt, but they were having too much fun to care.

Eventually, the ride began to slow, and after a while it stopped completely. The lap bar rose to let them off, and Alex walked over to meet them.

"So," he said. "Who's next?"

Later on, another group had reached the Untamed roller coaster. Of all the rides at Canobie Lake, this one was arguably the most intense. The coaster car seated four people. Ben and Alena sat in the back seat together, while Anthony sat in the front. Trent was at the control panel.

"Everyone strapped in?" he asked.

"Hell yeah," said Ben. "Let's go!"

Trent pressed some buttons, and the cart lurched forward. He waved goodbye as it exited the station onto the dark brown tracks.

The cart reached the chain lift, and tilted to a straight up, ninety degree angle. It was not a tall hill, but its angle made it very intimidating.

"Oh, it's been _way_ too long," Ben stated in anticipation.

They reached the top, and the cart flipped over it, as it traveled down the first drop. It was less than ninety degrees; it actually curled in on itself. The drop wasn't a very high one, but the adrenaline rush it gave was almost unmatched by any other ride in the park.

The riders screamed in excitement. They reached the bottom of the hill and traveled onto the next element: a loop. They sped through it, and along the twists and turns of the track.

The next element was an immelman loop. They zoomed through it, and onto the final inversion; a zero-g roll. Finally, they slowed down, reached the end of the track, and rolled back into the station.

They cheered and applauded as Trent released them.

"Let's go again!" Anthony suggested.

"Yeah!" Trent agreed. "But it's my turn to ride now. Get out."

"God damn it."

Matt was strapped in and ready to go.

He looked to his left and watched as Sam, Samantha and Elizabeth were buckling themselves in. Reuniclus was at the control panel, and

Gengar had gone off with another group. Shade and Ashmore were off flying somewhere.

"Alright!" Sam yelled. "We're ready!"

They were riding the Starblaster, as it was one of Matt and Sam's favorite rides in the park. As Reuniclus started the ride, the seats the four of them were in rose from the ground slowly. It stopped a few feet off of the ground as a computerized voice flooded from speakers. A computerized voice called out launch procedures.

Matt looked up and saw Ashmore land on top of the tower that was the ride. He grinned as the voice started its countdown.

"Threeâ€| Twoâ€| One."

For a brief second, nothing happened. There was a faint hiss from inside the tower behind them. And then they were launched.

Before Z-Day, Matt felt as if his heart had dropped out of his chest every time he was launched. And when it came back down, he could have sworn something moved inside its cavity. But now that he had spent months riding on Shade, he didn't feel that. He had built up a resistance.

But it was still great fun. They shot up at high speeds, and when they reached the top, Ashmore shot a ball of fire into the sky. The explosion occurred just as they reached the top, creating a neat effect.

They began to fall back down, and Matt felt himself lifting out of his seat. Then, a second later, they were going back up.

They all screamed, and the ride went through two more major drops like this before they mellowed out . Then, the riders were slowly lowered back to the ground.

"Well, that was awesome," Samantha commented.

"Yeah," Matt agreed. "Although being a dragon rider really takes a lot of the fun out of it.

Sam shrugged. "Oh well. Let's go again."

At around that time, trouble was brewing in Salem. Several hordes of zombies had formed while they had been in the park. They were scattered all throughout the town, and there were hundreds of them.

The good news was that they hadn't noticed them. Until now.

When Ashmore shot the ball of fire into the sky, it went higher than he had intended it to. The flash was seen all over town, and could be heard faintly as well.

The horde was coming.

As the horde made its slow but steady way towards the park, the oblivious group was still having fun. Alex, Nick and Evan had joined with a bigger group: Andrew, Jeremy, Kody, Jean, Joey and Brian. They

had a feeling Gengar was with them as well, as they had been hearing strange noises following them throughout the park, but nobody could be entirely sure.

They had made it all the way to the far side of the park. They were now boarding a ride called the Psychodrome. It was completely indoors, and composed of three arms that rotated in a circle. Attached to each of the three arms were four seats that rotated as well. It was more dizzy than almost any ride in the park.

The lights weren't on and the chamber was dark and cold, so Andrew took out his flashlight. The others did the same, and they searched for a light switch. Finally, they found it, and the room was illuminated.

The light was dim, but it was enough. The room was visible, the ceiling a dark, grey metal dome and the ride a cold, forlorn skeleton. They decided to force Andrew to sit out the first time in order to operate the controls.

As his friends got into the seat, Andrew walked reluctantly to the control panel. Before he got there, however the door to the ride shut by itself. He hesitated for a moment, and stared at it in confusion.

The lights went out.

Gengar, Andrew thought.

A split second later, he felt something grab him from behind and pull him back.

He struggled. "Get off of me, you stupid ghost!" Andrew yelled. But Gengar was too strong. He pushed Andrew into a seat and lowered the lap bar into place.

Andrew felt his presence recede, and tried to get out. But the lap bar was too tight, and it wasn't five seconds before the ride was started.

His seat began to move, as did all the others. Strobe lights attached to the walls started to blink rapidly, making everything look as if it were a stop motion film. The ride picked up speed rapidly, and Andrew's heart started pounding in his chest. Normally when he was on this ride, it pounded from exhilaration. This time, it was partly from worry about what Gengar would do.

Sure enough, he was up to no good. Gengar began to torment the riders with visions: red, malice-filled eyes and maniacal grinning faces waiting for them around every turn. As the ride began to spin even faster, the riders were jerked around the chamber. Gengar's influence made them feel as if the ride was going out of control.

Andrew felt himself begin to panic. Around him, his friends' screams filled the room. They were more terrified than they had ever been on this ride before. As Andrew's seat brought him past Evan's cart, however, he saw that the expression on his face seemed to be one of complete indifference.

Somehow, this reminded him that it was all a joke. Nothing could

happen to him, and it was just Gengar being Gengar. He forced the terror away, and it gave into enjoyment.

He yelled in excitement as the ride spun at intense speeds. The way the two rotations overlapped created the feeling of being roughly pulled from one side of the room to another, and then being jerked in a completely different direction. It was wonderfully exciting.

Around him, his friends came to the same realization he had, and their terror dissipated. Finally, it was completely gone, and replaced by sheer enjoyment.

The ride continued for another minute before Gengar realized that he was no longer getting the reaction he craved. Finally, he decreased the ride's speed until it came to a stop. The lap bars released their hold.

"Gengar, I have had it up to _here_ with you!" Brian yelled.

"Yeah!" Nick yelled. "I would like to go again, though. Except this time _without the_ _bad acid trip!_"

Sometime later, that group, still comprised of the same people, had made it back to the other side of the park. They were now boarding the Ferris wheel.

Evan had been chose to operate the controls this time. There were some that questioned whether this was wise, but the overall consensus was that he was not yet crazy enough to try and kill them with a Ferris wheel.

Andrew, Joey and Brian boarded first. They chose the same cabin, and once they shut the door, Evan started the ride.

What the hell is he doing? Joey wondered. _We haven't even finished boarding yet!_

Apparently, the others were thinking the same thing, because from below he could hear the sound of irritated voices. When they were halfway up, the ride stopped.

"Awwww," said Andrew. "You interrupted my high!"

The others boarded beneath them, and then the ride started again. Joey readied himself for a nice, relaxing ride.

Until he saw something that made him stare in horror.

When they were almost at the top, Joey looked out over the park. He froze, and panic began eating away at his mind. He didn't know where they had come from, or how they had gotten in, but those things don't matter when you're in an amusement park crawling with zombies.

The horde had arrived.

42. Chapter Forty-One: The Push

****Chapter Forty-One****

****The Push****

****Salem, New Hampshire****

"Guys!" Joey yelled. "Guys! Look out!"

The others turned to see. "Holy shit!" Andrew yelled.

"Fuck!" Nick yelled from below.

They were beginning their descent. At the base of the ride, the zombies were slowly closing in on them. Joey, Brian and Andrew drew their guns.

Evan, still at the control panel, seemed oblivious to the danger. _We've got to warn him, _Andrew thought. "Evan!" he yelled. "Look behind you!"

Evan turned around, and immediately drew his gun. The zombies had entered the ride's queue, and were closing in on him.

"Listen to me," Andrew called. "You need to-"

But Evan wasn't listening. He fired a few shots of his SAW into the horde and then turned and ran. He jumped into the compartment directly behind them, and they began to ride again.

"Evan! What the fuck?" Joey yelled. "You were supposed to get us off!"

"Why would you want to get off?" asked Evan. "We're safer here!"

Below them, they heard gunshots as the others reached the bottom of their loop. They looked down and saw that the zombies were starting to emerge from underneath the roof of the queue.

They reached the top as the others ceased their fire. As they began their descent, Andrew remembered something.

Gengar might be with them.

He leaned over the side of the car and yelled, "Gengar! If you're here, help us out!"

Below them, the zombies had reached the base of the Ferris wheel. The only things preventing the horde from reaching them was their inability to climb and the movement of the ride.

Andrew gripped his gun as he prepared to shoot, but just as they reached the halfway point of their descent, they stopped.

It looked as if Gengar was there after all.

Andrew grinned. "There's one problem solved," he said.

"Yeah," Brian agreed. "Now how are we going to get down?"

"Shit!"

On the other side of the wheel, Jeremy and Jean were in a seat together.

"This is bad," said Jean.

"No shit," said Jeremy. "Looks like we're gonna have to do some climbing." He approached the edge of their compartment and climbed on top of the seat. Then, he jumped to the large, white, metal beam that attached it to the rest of the wheel. His heart stopped as he felt himself slip, but he managed to get a hold.

"Fuck," he said. "That was horrible." He pulled himself up and began to slide towards the center of the ride. "Come on," he said to Jean.

"Fuck this shit," Jean muttered. He followed Jeremy onto the beam.

Around them, the others were getting the same idea. Jeremy could hear Nick and Alex trying to persuade Kody, who was afraid of heights, to jump. As of yet, they were unsuccessful.

Jeremy and Jean made their way to the center of the wheel. Once they reached it, they looked down and saw something horrifying; the zombies had begun to climb.

"What the fuck?" Jean asked. "No! That's not supposed to happen!"

_That's it, _Jeremy thought. _This just crossed the line from deep shit to bullshit._

"Guys!" he yelled. "This just got a little more complicated!"

As the others cried out in shock and terror, Jeremy aimed his gun and fired. The zombies he hit dropped like stones, but more were close behind.

As he and Jean kept shooting, they heard more gunshots coming from above. Suddenly, two of the zombies were jerked off of the ground and dragged into the sky. When they reached a frightening height, they were dropped.

"Yeah!" a voice yelled from right next to them. "Go Gengar!" They turned to see Joey, Brian and Andrew next to them, with Evan close around.

More zombies flew, and they kept shooting. The number of zombies on the ground had grown, but now that the humans were fighting back, they were shrinking again. Finally, by the time Evan, Alex, Nick and Kody reached them, they were almost gone. Slowly but steadily, they made their way down the red-stained skeleton of the Ferris wheel to the bloodstained ground.

Jeremy leapt one last time. As his feet hit the ground, a small splash of blood splashed onto his shoes. "God damn it," he said. "I liked these shoes!"

One by one, the others dropped down behind him. During that time, a few more zombies wandered too close, and were greeted by bullets to the face.

Finally, once everyone was down, Gengar materialized next to them.

"I take back everything I've said about you, Gengar," said Nick. "I love you."

"Don't celebrate now," said Jeremy, as he grabbed the backpack they had left on the ground, which contained their first aid supplies. "Let's go out of this yet."

At that time, Ben, Alena and Trent were on the Starblaster. Anthony was at the control panel, and Ben, Alena and Trent were strapped into the row facing him.

Unfortunately, the nearest horde was coming from the opposite direction. Anthony, the only one who could see them, was turned away from them and hunched over the control panel. By the time he noticed it, the horde was right on top of them.

"Alright, I think I've got it," he said. "It's this button right-holy shit!"

He lifted his gun and started shooting. Ben and the others looked in the direction he was firing in, and saw a massive amount of zombies shamle into view. Ben struggled to get out of his seat, but the lap bar was too tight. He couldn't do it.

Anthony continued shooting until he ran out of ammo. When he stopped to reload, the zombies were almost on top of him.

"Hey!" Alena yelled. "Let us out, dumbass!"

Anthony finished reloading and turned to the control panel. He reached out to hit the button that released them, but at the last second a zombie grabbed his arm. He slipped up and hit the start button.

A hiss and whirring noise signaled the start of the ride. "No!" Trent yelled as they were lifted from the ground.

The zombie who had grabbed Anthony sunk its teeth into the flesh of his arm, causing him to scream in pain. With his other hand, he smashed it in the head with his gun as hard as he could. He repeated the process and killed it. In the long run, however, it was ineffective, because more kept coming.

They were climbing over the fence that separated the ride from the rest of the park. "Fuck this," said Ben. They had stored their automatics in the storage bin in front of the ride, but they still had their pistols with them. Ben withdrew him and shot at the zombies attacking Anthony. Next to him, Alena and Trent did the same.

Suddenly, he heard the computerized voice start the count down.

_"__Threeâ€| Twoâ€| One."_"

"Anthony!" he yelled, shooting another zombie. By this point, Anthony had reloaded, and was shooting them too. "Hold on! We're almost- Holy shit!" He was cut off as they were launched into the air.

The ride shot them up along the tower at intense speeds. Ben tried to aim at the zombies, but they were going too fast. He couldn't get a good shot. They came back down again, and Ben managed to get a shot in, but it only hit a zombie's arm. It kept going.

They went back up. Anthony seemed to be holding off on his own, but they could tell that he wouldn't last much longer.

They came down again and shot a few more rounds. They managed to hit some zombies this time, but their efforts still had little effect. They rose back up for one more large drop. Once the drop was over, the ride began to mellow out, and they had a much easier time aiming.

As the ride finished, they got to work picking off the zombies that were cornering Anthony. They were just in time, too; any longer and he would've been a goner. Once the area was temporarily clear, Anthony called to them. "Thanks!" he yelled.

"Don't mention it!" Ben yelled back. "Now let us the fuck off this ride!"

Anthony made sure to press the right button this time, and the lap bars disengaged. Ben jumped out of his seat and ran for the storage bin to grab his gun. Alena and Trent did the same, with Trent also grabbing the group's backpack, and they aimed at the horde, which was quickly coming to replace its fallen members. The four of them fired into the crowd, their salvo unrelenting until every last zombie in a fifty foot radius- and some beyond- were killed. Then, as they paused to reload, Anthony ran to them.

"Iâ€| I got bit," he said. "Oh shit, I got bit I GOT BIT!"

"Calm down!" said Trent. "Let's just get out of here! You'll be okay."

"How can you say that?" asked Anthony. "You _know _what happens when we get bit!"

"You're forgetting that we have a cure," said Ben. "You're gonna be fine, as soon as we get out of here. Come on!"

They turned to the direction of the exit. The street was crowded with zombies. They had a lot of ammo left, but even still, they didn't know if they'd be able to make it.

"I'm not sure if we can do this," said Alena, echoing his thoughts.

Ben aimed his gun at a zombie's head and shot. A spray of blood filled the air. "Maybe, maybe not," he said. "But we've got to give it a try."

Meanwhile, the final group was riding the Turkish Twist.

Again, Shade and Ashmore were not on the ground with them, as they were off flying somewhere, and Reuniclus was controlling the ride. Since Sam hated this ride, however, he was with the dragons this time.

The Turkish Twist was a large, circular room under a roof. Riders stood against the inside wall, and when the ride was started, the room began to spin. Eventually, it would spin so fast that the riders would become pinned to the wall due to the force. Then, the floor would drop, and they would stay stuck to the walls.

Before any of them realized what was going on, Reuniclus had started the ride. Matt, Sam, Samantha and Elizabeth felt a spark of anticipation as the room began to spin. That was when Reuniclus saw the zombies.

"Guys!" she yelled. "There's a horde here! They're right on top of us!"

The mood of the riders instantly turned from ecstatic to panicked. "Shit!" Matt yelled. "Stop the ride!"

Reuniclus tried the button, but something was wrong. It was jammed. "It won't stop!" she yelled. "The button's stuck!"

"Oh come on!" Sam yelled. The room was spinning really fast now, and they felt the force begin to press them to the wall.

The zombies had reached the balcony above them, where Reuniclus was. They started to walk around the circular path to her, closing in on both sides. She continued to try at the button, but it was still jammed no matter how hard she tried. Suddenly, while she was distracted, a zombie reached her and tried to grab her.

She instantly sent out a wave of psychic energy that knocked back all of the zombies. Some fell off of the building, but one fell into the control panel, pressing the button that dropped the floor. Another fell into the ride itself

The room was now spinning enough for the riders to be completely stuck to the wall. The floor began to drop, and they were completely helpless. As it fell into the ride, the zombie landed right on top of Samantha.

"Oh my God!" she yelled. "Help, Reuniclus!" She struggled as the zombie attempted to bite her throat. She pushed it back, but it took all of her strength to do so; the force inside the room was so powerful.

"I'm trying!" Reuniclus yelled. "I can't get a good grip on it! You're going too fast!"

"Then get us out of here!" she yelled.

Reuniclus forced the button a few more times, but to no avail. On the fifth time, it seemed to move a little bit. She was getting there.

Samantha, meanwhile, was still struggling with the zombie. Matt had

tried to pull out his pistol, but couldn't get a good shot. He would only end up shooting her.

She had no choice. She had to use his knife.

With all of her strength, Samantha pushed the zombie away from herself with her left arm. With her right, she reached into her pocket and grabbed her hunting knife. Grunting with the effort, she reached up with it and slowly stuck it into the zombie's eye.

Because she didn't have the strength to go fast, she had to do it slowly. She looked away; this was a sight he didn't want to see. Even hearing the sounds made him start to feel sick.

The only good thing to come of it was that the zombie died quickly. Samantha pulled the knife out and pushed the corpse off of him. It stuck to the wall next to him, and blood began pooling. She felt her shirt start to get wet.

"Hurry, Reuniclus! Please!" she yelled.

Reuniclus kept trying the button, until finally, she was able to push it in. The floor instantly sprung to life, and began to rise up to meet them. Relief pulsed through Sam. Their hell was almost over.

Above them, Reuniclus shot out another pulse of psychic energy, knocking the zombies back again. The floor continued to rise, until finally it was touching their feet again. The spinning decelerated, and the force pinning them to the wall began to lift. Finally, the dead zombie next to Sam fell to the floor, along with some of its blood.

A few feet next to him, Matt had finally been able to draw his pistol. He tried to aim at some zombies who had reappeared up on the balcony, but the room was still spinning too fast. The chances of accidentally hitting Reuniclus were too high.

And then he had an idea.

"Reuniclus!" he yelled. "Use your powers to direct my bullets!"

_"__That's a good idea! Shoot!_"_

Matt shot up at a zombie. He would have missed, but Reuniclus redirected the bullet right into the zombie's brain. He emptied the rest of his clip, and was able to take out three zombies before the ride slowed to a stop.

_"__Okay! You take it from here!" _Reuniclus ordered. _"I'll go down and open the door!"_

Matt nodded. "Alright!" he said. He took aim and shot another zombie as Reuniclus disappeared from sight. Sam, Samantha and Elizabeth could only watch helplessly; their weapons were outside.

Matt shot three more zombies before the door was open. They all rushed outside and immediately went to get their weapons.

"Thanks," Matt said to Reuniclus as he grabbed his AK. Next to him, Samantha grabbed her sound gun, Sam grabbed his katanas and their backpack, and Elizabeth grabbed a pistol she carried for long distance fighting.

"__Don't mention it," _she replied.

"Let's just find the others," said Samantha. "I'm done here."

They looked around, and realized that the rest of the park was crawling with zombies. "That might be a problemâ€|" said Sam.

As soon as he said that, two shadows passed over them. Shade and Ashmore landed in an area that was relatively zombie-free, and slashed out at the few that were around them. When it was all clear, they bounded towards the others, killing zombies in their paths.

"Here's our ride," said Matt. "Come on!"

They ran to the dragons. Matt quickly jumped onto Shade's back, and helped Samantha up after him. Elizabeth joined Sam on Ashmore's back, and Reuniclus held on to them with her arms. Then, the two dragons took off.

"The others might be in trouble too!" Matt shouted. "We've got to help them if we can!"

They made a quick scan of the park, and spotted a small group fighting their way down the street from the Starblaster. They seemed to be doing okay, but the road ahead of them was filled to the brim with zombies. They would need help.

"Down there!" Sam yelled. The dragons dived simultaneously, and shot two balls of fire at the horde. There were two large explosions, and dead zombies flew everywhere.

But it wasn't good enough.

"More!" Matt yelled. "Come on!"

The dragons dived again, and killed off even more zombies. Sam remembered then that there was another group as well. It looked as if Matt and Shade would be able to cover this group well enough on their own.

"Come on, Ashmore," he said. "Let's go find the others."

The Night Fury flew across the park, searching for another group. They found them approaching the park exit. Sam counted, and confirmed that they were the remainder of the group.

The distance between them and the exit was clear, however, the parking lot was packed with zombies. They would need to thin them out before the group would be able to cross. It seemed Ashmore had reached the same conclusion, because he flew over the horde and pulled into a dive.

"Come on buddy," said Sam. "Show them what you've got."

Ashmore shot a massive ball of fire at the zombies, and charred bodies flew everywhere. He repeated the process twice, until a wide path had been carved out between the gate and the truck.

Their friends on the ground had reached the entrance, and were making their way towards the truck. "Looks like they've got this," Sam said. "You've only got one shot left. Let's save it for something important."

They had finally reached the park exit. Above them, Ashmore had finished his salvo and was flying in circles above them, making sure they were okay.

Thank God we have him, thought Nick. _We'd never have made it through that. Not all of us, anyway._

"Come on, we've got to move!" Alex exclaimed. "This path won't be open for much longer!"

They sprinted towards the truck as fast as they could. The path was wide, but with every second it was shrinking as zombies started to close in. Nick's heart pounded in his chest, as he remembered that night. It reminded him of the airstrike.

When they were halfway there, they realized that the zombies were getting too close. They raised their weapons and started shooting at any that got in their way.

Finally, they reached the truck. Jean, who got there first, opened the back door and they climbed in. He turned around to help the others up.

"I'm driving!" Alex announced. He ran around the truck, shooting a couple zombies, and made it to the front door.

"Shotgun!" Nick yelled. He ran up the length of the truck on the other side, opened the passenger door, and jumped in, slamming the door shut behind him.

Alex started the engine and rolled down the window. He stuck his head out to watch the others, and once he saw that everyone was in, he shifted the gear into drive and began to move forward.

"Wait!" said Nick. "What about the others?"

"I'm pulling up to the entrance," Alex replied. "We'll wait for them there."

Anthony and the others ran forward, shooting the zombies in front of them.

The dragons had helped immensely, almost clearing a path from them to the line of game booths right after the a roller coaster called the Yankee Cannonball. They had reached this point with little to no trouble, but between where they were and the entrance was the worst of the horde.

Anthony's arm hurt like hell, but he gritted his teeth and pushed through it, ignoring the blood that was dripping down his side. He

shot at the zombies relentlessly, determined to survive.

I am not going to die today, he thought.

"Come on!" Trent yelled. "We're already halfway there! We can do this!"

A loud, high-pitched ballistic shriek pierced the air as Shade and Matt dove at the zombies again. A ball of light flashed for an instant, and less than a second later a huge explosion ripped through the horde, leaving another hole for them to slip through. They ran into it, shooting any stray zombies that crossed their path.

Shade bombed another group up the street from them twice, aiding their progress even further.

After a little bit more running and shooting, they finally reached the plaza that the park gates opened up into.

"Looks like someone was already here," Ben observed. He was right; the plaza was littered with dead zombies.

"Let's just get to the truck," said Alena.

"That's the best idea I've heard all day," Anthony complimented.

They ran across the plaza, shooting zombies that had wandered back into it, until they finally reached the park gates. As they dashed through them, they saw a wonderful sight; the truck was waiting for them. The back doors were open, and gunfire sprayed out of them any time a zombie walked by.

"Let's go!" Anthony yelled. He ran forward, ahead of the group, sprinting towards the truck. Before he knew it, he was there, and he jumped into the back door. He looked around, and saw that everyone else was there, except those on the dragons.

He turned back to help up Trent, who had reached the truck next. Then, they helped Alena up, and lastly Ben.

"Shut the door!" Jeremy yelled once they were all in. He didn't need to tell them twice.

Alex and Nick were sitting in the front seat, waiting for word from Gengar. The ghost had appeared shortly after they had pulled up to the front, and with him they had formed a plan. Once everyone had gotten in the truck, he would appear to them again and tell them, so they didn't have to get out themselves.

Now, he materialized between them, startling Nick quite badly.

"Everyone in?" asked Alex.

He nodded. _Yes._

"Alright, let's go." He shifted the gear into drive and floored it, driving over a zombie that had stumbled in front of them. Between them and the road that led away were countless more. He drove over

them, and they were reduced to nothing but bloody speed bumps. Behind them, the road was stained red and littered with bodies.

Finally, they reached the road leading away from the park, and turned left onto it. There were a few more zombies on the road, but most of them were back in the park. He knew more would be coming though, with the amount of noise they had made.

Once they had gotten clear of the zombies, Alex started to drive even faster. He wanted to put as much distance between them and the park as possible, and as soon as possible at that. Beside him, Nick took a deep breath.

"That was close," he said.

In the truck, Anthony's arm was still bleeding. As Trent was helping him dress his wounds, they were talking.

"What the fuck is up with the zombies?" asked Andrew, frightened. "They aren't supposed to be able to do that!"

"What did they do?" asked Alena.

"They were _climbing the Ferris wheel!_"

"How the hellâ€|?"

"I don't know!"

"The zombies have been acting weird for more than a month now," Trent remembered. "Remember Lawrence?" he asked to Ben.

"It's like they're traveling in flocks nowâ€|" Ben observed. "I've never seen so many going to one place. I mean, they're still dumbfucks, butâ€| It almost seems systematic, the way they're attacking."

"I've never seen them do anything like what they did back on the ferris wheel," said Jean

Trent finished dressing Anthony's wound, and tightened the bandages around it. "We'll give you some anti-biotics when we get back," he said.

"What about the cure?" Anthony asked.

"Sam has it with him. We'll give it to you once we get back to Lyndrich.

Anthony nodded. "Okay," he said. "I could use a fucking smoke."

When they finally returned to Lyndrich, they parked the truck in the church parking lot. The church was on Main Street, just down the street from the town gas station, and right next door to the town hall. Its parking lot was massive. Ben, Trent, Anthony and Alena immediately piled into the Mazda, which was parked there, and drove to Sam's house.

The dragons, meanwhile, went there once they knew that the others had safely reached Lyndrich. They checked in with the three PokÃ©mon

watching the motion sensors, and then they waited for word.

It was Samantha who saw the Mazda pull up and park on the street in front of Sam's house. She called the others, and the three of them ran outside to meet them.

When Anthony stepped out, they gasped as they saw the bloodstained bandages covering his arm. "What happened?" asked Sam.

"He got bit!" Ben exclaimed. "Get the cure!"

Sam ran back inside and returned a moment later with his backpack. He opened it and produced a large, glass jar. All four doses had been stored in it. The clear liquid inside sloshed around as he opened it, and placed it on the ground. A small amount splashed out and dripped down the side, but Sam didn't notice.

He then pulled out a baggy containing four syringes. The needles had plastic coverings over them to keep them from breaking. He opened it and pulled one out, removed the covering, and stuck it in the liquid. Pulling back on the syringe, he filled it with 30 ccs of the cure.

Pressing it down so that a tiny squirt of the liquid came out of the tip, he grabbed Anthony's shoulder and pulled up his sleeve. "This might hurt a bit," he warned. He pressed his finger into the soft underside of Anthony's wrist, found a blood vessel, and slowly stuck the needle in.

Anthony tensed, as the needle uncomfortably penetrated his vein. Sam injected the cure, and then removed the needle. He then reached into his backpack and pulled out his first aid kit. Opening it, he took out a Band-Aid and put it over the hole, where blood was beginning to well.

"Hopefully that'll do it," he said. "I won't get your hopes up too high. There's a ten percent chance it won't work. We'll just have to wait and see.

Anthony nodded nervously. "Alright," he said. He pulled down his sleeve and turned to Ben. "Take me home," he said. "I need a smoke."

They turned to walk towards the car. Sam reached down with one hand to pick up the jar. He grabbed it and lifted, but when he had it about five feet in the air, something happened.

It slipped.

His hand couldn't get a proper grip on the glass, which was slippery from the liquid that had splashed out earlier. It fell to the ground. Time seemed to slow for Sam, as he reached out to grab it and missed. The jar hit the rocks that made up his driveway, and tipped over. The glass itself didn't break, but the cure was lost. It poured out of the jar and into the rocks, flowing through them and sinking into the earth beneath.

The five of them stared at the sight in horror.

"No!" Sam breathed. "NO!"

* * *

><p>Well then, thus concludes this week's chapters. Yes, I know I was about ten minutes late, but whatever. Anyway, let me know what you think!

43. Chapter Forty-Two: The Fall

****So guys! Another chapter- completely on time this week! Okay, this one is pretty short, granted, but it's still a chapter on time!****

****Anyway, there's something I'd like to ask of you readers. If you like this story, and don't mind, please spread the word! I would be very grateful if you do- just don't be obnoxious about it, please.****

****Disclaimer: HTTYD and Pokemon are not mine. Though there are none of those in this chapter incidentally.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Forty-Two:

****The Fall****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

During the ride back to Ben's house, Trent hadn't said a word. He had just stared blankly at the road ahead. When they had arrived at Ben's house, he silently entered the building, walked into the kitchen, looked out the window next to the refrigerator, and stood there in silence.

His silence made Ben nervous. He knew an outburst was coming, and he wished it would just happen already.

Finally, it did. Trent calmly took hold of a bottle of vodka next to him, and in one swift movement, he whirled around and whipped it across the room. It shattered as it hit the wall, and vodka splashed everywhere.

"FUCK!" he screamed. "FUCK IT ALL!"

"Dude," said Ben. "Calm down. Just breathe."

"You know what?" he asked, turning to look at Ben and pointing his finger at him. "Fuck you! I can't fucking 'calm down' right now! Do you realized how lucky we've been so far? It's a wonder we're still walking with all we've been through! We should be dead!" He walked up to Ben and stared him in the eye. "And that luck just ran out! The next time someone gets bitten, they're done! Dead!"

Ben said nothing, and took the verbal assault as it came, waiting for Trent to calm down.

Trent took a deep breath and turned around. "I'm sorry," he said. "this isn't your fault. It's justâ€¦ The next time one of us is

bitten- and it will happen eventually- then there'll be nothing we can do about it because I can't find any fucking leads!"

He turned towards the table and slammed his fist down upon it. There he stood, breathing heavily, until his eyes drifted towards the mess he had made with the vodka bottle.

"I'm going to clean this up," he announced. "Then, I'm going to take the laptop, the flash drive, and that journal up to my room. I'm not coming out until I have a lead."

Ben nodded. "Alright," he said.

Trent spent the next whole day in his room upstairs. He came out only to relief himself in the woods behind their house and to get food. He read the rest of the files in the flash drive, and then read through the book. Ben and Anthony were constantly asking him what he was doing, but every time they did, he gave fleeting answers at best.

Finally, at the end of the day, he found something. When he did, he immediately went to find Ben.

The teen was in his kitchen drinking vodka with Alena. "Hey!" Trent yelled as he walked into the room, journal and laptop in hand.

"What's up?" asked Ben.

Trent sat down next to him and put what he was carrying onto the table. He moved the book so that it was in between the two of them.

"I think I have a lead," he said.

"Finally," Alena commented. "What is it?"

Trent tapped the book with his index finger. "It's in here," he said. He opened the book to a page a little more than halfway through the book.

"This belonged to a guy named Zack West," he said.

"Was his father named Adam?" Ben asked hopefully.

"No," Trent replied.

"Awwâ€¦"

"Anyway, apparently he was a writer. Pretty damn good at it, too. He started this journal to keep his skills honed. He seemed like a pretty nice guy from what I've read."

"So how did he get involved with Gunnerville?" asked Alena.

"Well, he lived in Exeter Before," Trent explained. "He stayed there after New Hampshire fell. He did pretty well until they found him and forced him to relocate. He brought his journal along without them knowing- don't ask how, I don't feel like explaining it. From the looks of it, he hated them. He wrote down all of his feelings about

them, and it gets pretty offensive." He remembered the bruises Price had left on his body, and then looked at the stump that marked where Ben's pinky had once been. "Not that I'm complaining.

"He also wrote down every secret that he knew about them. Most of the things he wrote about are interesting, but there's one thing that's a little moreâ€¦"

Trent flipped to a certain page and pointed to an entry. "Right here," he said. "In this entry, Zack talks about overhearing the General- who he identifies as General Maynard- talking with Maverick. According to him, during the discussion, Maynard asked Maverick if he knew anything about the whereabouts of one Emily Shaw.

"I assume she's important," said Ben. "Who is she? What did they want with her?"

"Well, according to West, they wanted her dead. That's all he wrote on the matter. In fact, that was his last entry." Trent turned the page to reveal nothing but empty pages beyond it. "Personally, I think they found his journal, decided he knew too much, and ganked him."

"So then why did they just leave it there?" asked Ben.

Trent shrugged. "From what I hear, those Gunnerville men are far from competent. The only thing they were good at was violence and bossing people around."

He paused a moment, shut the book, pushed it aside and put the laptop where it had been. He opened it, and as it was booting up, he explained the next part of his discovery.

"I recognized the name Emily Shaw. I thought I had seen it in the flash drive somewhere. So I ran a search, and, sure enough, I found her."

He turned the laptop so that Ben and Alena could see. On the screen was a file about a woman named Dr. Emily Shaw. There was no picture, but there was a lot of text.

"From what I understand she started off pretty low on the ladder, and gradually made her way up. When she was low, she seemed to have had a decent reputation with the other scientists, but as she began to climb, she slowly started to lose that. She frequently got in trouble for insubordination, and was suspected of sabotage multiple times, though it was never proven." Trent looked up at them. "I think she knows something. I think we need to find her."

"I can see why you think that," said Ben. "But how do you know for sure?"

"I don't," Trent replied. "But look, this has gone on for far too long. Every day we wait is just another day that we could die, and we still haven't even found a thing about where Lucas is being kept. If he's even still alive. My point is, we finally have a lead on something. I know it's not the most reliable lead, but it's a lead all the same, and it's the only one we've got."

Ben nodded. "You have a point. But how are we going to find

her?"

"That's a good question. I have no idea where she is, but I know a place where we could find that information. Maybe."

"Where?" asked Alena.

Trent smiled. "Her workplace. She worked in New Hampshire's official laboratory, located somewhere in the Mount Washington Valley."

Ben and Alena were silent as they thought about what he had said.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you think?"

Ben smiled and nodded. "I think we finally have a lead," he said.

* * *

><p>Well, there you have it! The plot's back on track! Stay tuned for what happens next week!

44. Chapter Forty-Three: Dr Shaw

Guys, I am SO sorry. I didn't mean to wait this long, it just kind of... Happened.

**Anyway, I'm hoping to get back on a steady schedule, now that the holidays are over. I hope you all had a good holiday and have a Happy New Year! **

Now, here's a chapter.

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon

* * *

><p>Chapter Forty-Three:

Dr. Shaw

Somewhere in the Mount Washington Valley, New Hampshire

"So where's this lab supposed to be again?" asked Joey.

They had just exited the two cars they had used to drive there from Danville, and were getting ready to begin their search.

"Well, I managed to trace it back to these woods," said Trent. "It's not hidden underground like Aperture was, but it is hidden out of the way. If you see a 'No Trespassing' sign, we're in the right place. Also, some barbed wire would be a good indicator."

"And some sniper towers, just to be safe," Ben added jokingly.

Kody sighed. "Let's just get this over with," he said.

"Alright, let's head out," said Trent. "We might have to do some hiking, by the way."

"Oh yay," said Brian. "And there'll be zombies too, I presume?"

"No, there's gonna be unicorns dancing with gnomes and playing poker with fairies," Joey replied sarcastically.

"I actually wouldn't mind that," Brian replied.

"Me and Anthony saw some of those last night," Ben remarked.

They started their trek through the woods. For about an hour, they walked, looking for any clues that the lab was close, and keeping themselves entertained. Every once in a while, they would stab a zombie in the face.

"How much longer are we gonna look for this place?" asked Joey.
"We've been walking for an hour and haven't found anything except a couple zombies and a fuckton of trees!"

"Patience, young Padawan," said Ben.

"We'll get there, don't worry," said Trent. "It just might take a while."

"How are we gonna find the information anyway?" asked Brian. "Isn't the power out?"

"Well, maybe not," Trent replied. "Aperture had power."

"Aperture also had GLaDOS," Ben pointed out.

"True," said Trent. "Well, if it is, we've got Jack and Lily to help us out."

The giant spider was walking with them, keeping an eye out for signs the humans couldn't see, such as scent. Jack was nowhere in sight, but due to her ghostly abilities, that didn't mean that she wasn't there.

"Speaking of Jack, where is thatâ€¦ whatever the hell she is?" asked Ben

"Chandelure," Joey informed him.

"She's around here somewhere, I'm sure," said Trent. "Ah! Speak of the devil!"

Ahead of them, Jack materialized and motioned for them to follow her.

"She found something!" Joey observed excitedly. "Finally!"

They followed her through the woods until they finally came to an old, rusty sign reading, _'No Trespassing!'_

Looks like we're getting close, Trent observed.

"So how the hell did Matt find one of these anyway?" asked Alena.

Ben shrugged. "He said he thought it was an abandoned military base, and went there looking for ammo or something."

Trent nodded. "Some of them were disguised as military bases," he explained.

They continued their trek, passing more 'No Trespassing' signs as they went. Finally, after several minutes, they came to a large barbed-wire fence.

"Well now what?" asked Ben. "It's not like we can just climb over this. Not unless we like pain."

"I'd rather not," said Joey. "Let's see if we can find a gate or something."

Suddenly, a burst of fire came off of Jack's body, flowing straight into the fence. The metal began to glow, and then melted in place. By the time she was done, there was a large hole in the fence, and the ground beneath it was covered in molten metal.

"Well, that solves that problem. Thanks!"

Jack's eyes narrowed slightly, and the line that connected them curved upwards as if she were smiling.

"Alright, let's go," said Trent. He tentatively took a step onto the metal and found that it had already returned to its solid form. He walked through the gate to the other side, and the others followed.

"We're almost there," Trent stated. "Just a little bit further."

"Jesus, this place is out of the way," Joey commented. "How the hell did these people get to work on time?"

"I'm pretty sure they lived here," Trent replied.

"Ohâ€¦ Well that would definitely make things easier."

"Hey Kody, what's up?" asked Brian, changing the subject. "You haven't said a single word since we left the car."

Kody shrugged. "I'm not in a very good mood," he explained.

"Cheer up!" said Joey. "We might be able to wipe all zombies off the face of the Earth soon!"

"Those undead motherfuckers deserve it," Alena muttered.

Ben unslung his backpack, opened it, took out a bottle of beer and raised it. "I'll drink to that," he said. He took a swig, capped the bottle and returned it to his backpack.

After a few more minutes of walking, they finally found the lab. It was an average-sized, three-story building surrounded by trees. The walls were cracked, and moss and ivy had grown over it. It looked, for all intents and purposes, like it had been abandoned for years.

"This is it?" Ben asked, underwhelmed. "This looks less like a top secret government base and more like that house at the end of _The Blair Witch Project!_"

"That's the point," said Trent.

They approached the front door and opened it. It was pitch black inside, as the building was windowless.

"Hey, Jack," said Trent. "Could you give us some light?"

Jack's fire flared up, dimly illuminating the room. What they saw was a stark contrast from the building's bleak exterior. The lobby was dusty, but otherwise well kept. The walls were polished white, and the front desk held a very high-tech computer on top of it that looked as if it were still in working condition. Next to the desk was an elevator. The only dirty thing in the room, other than the dust, was the corpse slumped against the desk.

"Well," said Trent. "We made it. But before we go on, I think we should leave some guards. Who wants to stay behind?"

Kody's hand immediately shot up. "I'll stay," he volunteered.

"I'll stay too," Ben offered.

"Alright," said Trent. "That's about enough. Stay here, and keep an eye out for zombies, or anything else that could kill us. If we're not back in three hours, assume the worst. Everyone else, follow me.

Trent led them past the elevator and down a hallway that led to the rest of the first floor.

"Good luck!" Ben called after them.

The group searched the three floors and found nothing but equipment storage rooms. They returned to the lobby, and Lily powered the elevator, granting them access to Sublevel One.

Once they arrived, they felt as if they were in a whole other world. Things were different down here; everything looked completely futuristic. Neon lights lined the white walls, and everything about it screamed futuristic. From directories to computers to the doors themselves.

A directory on the wall showed ten massive sublevels in the lab. It wasn't as big as Aperture, but it was still pretty sizeable. The first floor was nothing but facilities for the scientists who had lived there. They found a stairwell and continued on to the next floor.

They emerged into a long hallway. "Are we there yet?" asked Joey.

I hope so, thought Jack. She needed a break; she could only keep up a constant stream of fire this bright for so long. She had illuminated dark rooms before, but never for this long, or this brightly._

"Let's hope so," said Trent. "This place is giving me the creeps."

They proceeded down the hallway. Lily was walking next to Jack, making conversation as they went.

"How're you holding up?" the Galvantula asked. "Alright?"

Jack nodded. She sent Galvantula a series of feelings and images that explained her desire for rest. Jack, like most Chandelures, had no proper mouth. She breathed through her fire, and ate by absorbing life forces. She had no real need for one, and therefore, she was mute. But since she was also part ghost, she had the ability to conjure images in other people's heads. It was similar to Reuniclus's telepathy, only not with words.

Lily understood what Jack was trying to tell her. "Well, I'm sure we'll find it sooner or later. Then, I'll take over for you, alright? I'm sure they're gonna need meâ€¦" she chuckled.

Jack sent out a feeling of gratitude, and "grinned" at her. _Thanks, _she thought, though she knew Lily wouldn't hear it. She did it anyway, as it helped her to form the images and feelings she needed to send out. Only Reuniclus could hear her thoughts. It was one of the reasons they were so close.

"So, uhhâ€¦ Have you noticed anythingâ€¦ weird about Trent?" asked Lily.

Jack thought about it. She wasn't sure she knew what Lily meant. Sure, Trent seemed more determined than he had been before, but that was all she noticed. She was grateful to him, to tell the truth. She wanted the zombies gone as much as everyone else, so that they might finally have a chance to live in peace.

Jack transmitted these thoughts to Lily, who paused for a moment as she interpreted her feelings. "Yeahâ€¦ I guess I feel the same way," she said. But I feel like this whole thing is starting to get to his head, that's all."

The Chandelure was confused. _What do you mean by that?_ She wondered. She sent her question to Lily.

"Well, it's probably nothing, butâ€¦ it feels like he's getting too eager to find this Machine. I don't blame him, but I'm worried he's going to rush into it. I'm worried he might get himself- or someone else- hurt. Or worse, killed.

She's right, Jack realized. _Butâ€¦ He's probably just excited, right? He'd never hurt one of us._

Right?

She sent these concerns to Lily. "Yeahâ€¦ I hope so," said the spider. But Jack detected a hint of uncertainty in her voice.

The group came across a large set of double doors. Trent opened them, and they passed through. On the other side was a massive room full of cubicles.

"Well, this job just went from awesome to boring as hell," said Joey.

"I bet this is where they recorded the written part of their experiments," Alena theorized.

"Yeah, like lab reports and papers and stuff," said Brian.

Sounds boring, thought Jack. Beside her, Lily felt her feelings and chuckled.

"Maybe Emily Shaw's cubicle is here somewhere," Trent thought aloud.

"Didn't you say she was high up?" asked Alena. "Why would she have a cubicle if she was?"

"Trust me," said Trent. "With the kind of trouble she got in, she's lucky she wasn't fired. In fact, I think the only reason she wasn't was because they didn't want her to talk."

They began to walk down the rows of cubicles, reading off names. The room was huge, and it took several minutes until they finally found hers. It was almost completely empty, save for a computer and a chair.

"Hey, Lily," Trent called. "Could you power up this computer for me?"

Lily nodded. "Take a rest for a minute," she said to Jack. Then, she walked to the computer. As she started to transfer power to it, Jack dimmed her fire significantly.

Ah, she thought. _That feels better._

"Damn it," Trent cursed. "It's password protected."

"Well now what?" asked Brian. "What are you gonna do, hack it?"

Trent brightened up. "That's a great idea!" he exclaimed. He started typing lines of code into the computer.

"Wait, you know how to hack?" asked Joey.

"Of course! You need those kinds of skills to investigate a government conspiracy! _Especially_ one as deep as this!"

Trent typed a few more lines, then hit enter. "Yes!" he cheered as he was granted access.

Over the next several minutes, he searched through the documents on the computer. Lily kept it powered the whole time, while the others stood in silence. Jack sent feelings of concern to her; she wanted to know how she was holding up.

"I'm okay," Lily reassured. "Kinda feeling like you did, though."

Jack sent a wave of sympathy to her. _I'm sorry,_ she thought.

"It's all right," said Lily.

Finally, Trent found all he needed to know. He stood up. "Alright," he said to Lily. "You can rest now."

The Galvantula cut off her flow of energy. The computer immediately shut down, and Lily laid down on the floor.

"Okay then," said Trent. "Here's what I found. She worked on the genetic engineering projects, but was demoted from them after too many incidences of insubordination. It doesn't explain what she did. But it does say that she worked on a project that involved making deals with local organizations and businesses. She was responsible for making deals with Attitash, a local ski resort, and acting as a representative on this laboratory's behalf. They would provide funding, and in return, Attitash and other organizations would do their best to divert attention from this area of the woods.

"That's really smart, actually," Alena complimented. "It's frightening, actually, how well they kept this all hidden. It makes you think what else our government has been hiding."

Yeah, that's like Gengar-level craftiness, Jack thought. She sent the joke to Lily, who laughed. "Yeah," she agreed. "Only difference is, he wouldn't use it to torture Ashmore."

"Was there anything else?" asked Brian.

"No," said Trent, the disappointment in his voice evident. "But there was something else. Her superior- after she was demoted, anyway- was named Dr. Steven Fray, and his office was around here somewhere. He might have some more information."

They left the cubicle in search of Dr. Fray's office. Trent asked Jack if she could provide light, but she was still a little tired. She sent feelings to his head, and recognizing them as hers, he took out a flashlight instead.

They traveled to the edge of the room, and walked along the border. Doors on the walls led to offices, and the name of each office's owner was printed on the wall next to them. Finally, after much walking, they found Dr. Fray's name.

Trent opened the door and they walked in. This office was much more personalized than Shaw's; there were pictures of a woman and children on the desk, and various ornaments scattered across the room. They crossed the carpeted floor to the desk, which held one of the most advanced computers they had ever seen. "Lily, I know you're probably still worn out, but could you power this computer for me?" Trent asked.

Lily nodded. "Here we go again," she said. She approached the computer and began to power it up. Once it was on, Trent hacked into it, and began to read through the files.

Several minutes passed once again. _I wonder if he's finding anythingâ€¦_ Jack wondered. She floated behind him and attempted to read what was on the screen. She wasn't great at reading, but she vaguely knew how to do it.

Squinting at the screen, she caught a glimpse of some words about experiments, laboratories, and other things. But before she had time to register what she was reading, Trent finished.

"Alright," he said. "You can stop if you want," he said to Lily.

The spider cut off her flow of energy, and the computer powered down. _Dang it, _Jack thought. _Oh well._

"Find anything?" asked Alena.

"Yeah," Trent replied. "I think I know where we need to go next."

"Where?"

"Well, you know how I said she was involved with Attitash?" he asked. "Well, apparently they had built them a hidden lab up there. You know, as a representation of their business deal. As someone who was high up on the company ladder, she was awarded it as her own private office of sorts. Nothing huge, but a computer, some experimentation tools, et cetera.

"But when she was demoted, they had to take it from her. They removed all of her things from it and changed the passcode. But it's still there."

"Do you think she went back after Z-Day?" asked Brian.

"No. But I hope she did. I think it's worth a shot; I mean, it sounds like a really safe place, you know?"

"Yeah," Joey agreed. "Yeah, I'd say it's worth a shot. Do you know where on Attitash it is, though?"

"It said it was somewhere on the summit," Trent replied. "While that's still pretty vague, I'd say it narrows it down significantly."

"Alright," said Alena. "So are we done here?"

"For now," Trent replied. "If this proves to be a dead end, I'll want to come back. You guys don't have to come with me if you don't want to, though."

"So let's go then," said Joey.

"Right behind you," Brian agreed. "I don't like this place."

They emerged from the lab to see Ben and Kody right where they were left. "We're back. Any trouble?" Trent asked.

Ben shook his head. "Nope."

"Good."

"So did you find anything?"

"Yes, we did," said Trent. "I'll explain to you on the way back. But

let's just say that we're gonna make a quick stop at Attitash on the way home."

"Wait, hold up," said Joey. "We're not going to Attitash yet."

"Why not?" asked Trent. "We're right here!"

"Because we're tired," said Joey. "We want to go home now. And we don't have enough time or people today!"

"But we could drive right there and then be home before we're missed!" Trent protested.

"No, we couldn't," said Alena. "It's more than an hour to get back to the car, and almost two hours to get home. We don't have the time right now."

"And I don't know if you realize this, but Attitash is huge," Joey added. "There are two mountains, and the main one alone has a pretty big summit. It would take forever to find it."

Trent struggled inwardly to accept this. "Butâ€¦| But we could end thisâ€¦|!"

"We're not gonna end it tonight, either way," said Ben. "Joey and Brian are right. We need to go back."

Trent groaned in frustration. "Fine!" he exclaimed. He stormed off into the woods.

Brian and Joey looked at each other. "What's up with him?" asked Ben.

"I don't knowâ€¦|" Joey replied.

Together the group followed him. Ben briefly lingered behind, staring after Trent, before he joined them.

45. Chapter 44: The One Who Came Before

****Hey guys! Sorry for the missing week! I've been busy, what with college starting up again and all. Anyway, here's the next chapter!****

****I will say that we are getting very close to the Part Two finale... This one is three chapter long, and starts with Chapter Forty-Eight! So after this one, we have three more chapters and then the finale! I'll possibly be waiting a week in between Forty-Seven and Forty-Eight to get a headstart on editing this, because I want to put it all up at once.****

****In addition, I'd like to ask you guys a favor. If you know anyone whom you think might like this story, recommend it to them! I'd love to get more readers.****

****Anyway, that's all for now. I hope you enjoy this chapter!****

* * *

><p>Chapter Forty-Four:

****The One Who Came Before****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Upon their return, they brought news of their discovery. Quickly, they formed a team to go out and search the mountain the next day.

When the morning came, Trent, Ben, Alena, Brian, Anthony, Joey, Jean, Andrew, Matt, Shade, Sam, Ashmore, Alex, Reuniclus, Jack, Lily, Elizabeth, and Samantha met at the town hall. Once they got situated, they set out on their mission.

After a couple of uneventful hours of driving and flying, they arrived at their destination in the town of Bartlett. They parked in Attitash's parking lot. As they exited their vehicles and dismounted their dragons, they looked up at the mountain looming before them.

"It looks weird without people," Matt commented. "It's completely deserted."

"And quiet," Joey added.

"So this thing's at the summit?" asked Alex.

"One of them," replied Trent.

"Oh great," said Jean. "This is gonna take forever."

"Quit complaining," Alex scolded. "Take it like a man."

"Soâ€¦ how are we gonna get up there?" asked Anthony.

"Well, I was hoping Shade and Ashmore could help us with that," said Trent.

Matt glanced at Shade, who shrugged. _Why not?_

"Alright," Matt replied. "But they can only take two at a time."

"That's fair," Trent agreed.

"I call first ride!" Ben shouted. He ran forward and jumped onto Shade. Unprepared for this, the dragon fell over, sending Ben face first into the snow.

"Ow," he said, his voice muffled. Matt was laughing hysterically at the sight.

Shade stood up and motioned for Matt to get on his back. Matt climbed on and the Night Fury turned to Ben. He walked up to him, bit down on his jacket, and picked him up in his mouth.

"Hey! What're you-!"

Shade charged forward and jumped into the air. He flapped his wings a

few times and took off.

"Holy fucking shit!" Ben yelled. "No! This is not fun!"

From on top of Shade's back, Matt thought he heard the dragon's muffled laughter. He could barely hold his own laughter in. After a few more seconds, he failed completely.

After a bit more of this, they arrived at the summit. The view was absolutely incredible. The mountains were beautiful, and washed in a mix of greens, grays and whites. The sky was a deep blue, and the sun was bright as it reflected off of the ice and snow below.

As he and Shade were basking in the beauty of the mountain scenery, something else caught his eye.

Storm clouds.

They were off in the distance, very far, but it still troubled him.

As they swooped in for a landing, Shade let go of Ben a few feet from the ground. He tumbled to a rough landing and got yet another face full of snow. This time, it was so deep he created a hole. Shade and Matt landed a few feet away from him, just in front of the vacant chair lift.

"Thanks," Ben muttered sarcastically, his voice muffled by the snow.

Matt slid off of Shade and went to go help Ben up. "I'm sorry," he said. "You know how he gets."

Ben walked over to Shade and punched him on the shoulder. "Bastard," he said.

Shade whacked him in the back of the head with his tail, grinning back.

Behind them, another black shape was descending from the sky. Ashmore landed right next to them, and Sam and Samantha slipped off of his back.

"Welcome to the summit of Attitash," said Matt. Shade took off after Ashmore, and the four humans gathered around each other.

"Did you see those storm clouds?" Matt asked the three of them.

"Yeah," Ben replied sarcastically. "Between being scared out of my mind and shitting my pants, I totally had time to observe the weather."

Sam frowned. "I did," he said. "But I don't think it should be a problem. They were really far off, and we don't even know if it's a serious storm. Besides; if it's a cause for concern, we can use the dragons to get back to the lodge quickly."

Matt nodded. "Alright then," he said. "That's reassuring."

A few minutes later, Shade and Ashmore arrived with Trent, Alena, Elizabeth, Reuniclus, Jack and Joey. They returned for more of the humans, while Trent began his search.

"Alright," he said. "Joey, Matt, Sam, Ben, you guys are the snow sports experts. Where would be the best place for a hidden laboratory up here?"

"Fuck if I know," said Joey. "It could be _anywhere_."

"Do you even know what you're doing?" asked Ben.

"Sure I do!" Trent exclaimed. "I'm gonnaâ€¦ Hmmâ€¦"

"No. You don't."

As they tried to think of where to search first, Shade and Ashmore returned, this time with Brian, Andrew, Jack, and Lily. They dropped them off and then flew back to the base of the mountain.

"Hey," said Matt. "Did the information you found specifically say it was on _this_ summit? I mean, could it be on Bear Peak?"

"Yeahâ€¦ It could be," said Trent. "Who wants to go over there to look?"

Matt had an idea just then. Smiling to himself, he held up his index finger. "One second," he said. He turned to Sam. "Can I talk to you alone?"

"Sureâ€¦?" said Sam, frowning in confusion.

They walked until they were just out of earshot of the others, and then Matt said, "I want to try something."

"What?" Sam asked.

"Dragonboarding."

"Waitâ€¦ you meanâ€¦?"

"Yes. I want to dragonboard over to Bear Peak."

Sam smiled. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "That is an _awesome _idea!"

"So you're in?"

"Hell yeah!" He held up his hand and Matt slapped it in a high-five.

They returned to the group. "We'll go," Matt volunteered.

Shade and Ashmore returned one final time, carrying Anthony, Alex, Jean and Andrew. Now, everyone was together and they began their search.

As the others wandered around to look for signs of a lab- or, at most, a trail- Matt and Sam relayed their idea to Shade and Ashmore. The dragons liked it, and they picked a ski trail to try it on. Matt wanted to try Ptarmigan, the hardest trail on either mountain, and

also his favorite, but they decided against it. It was too steep for their first try. They decided instead to try the much tamer Wilfred's Gawn.

It was directly to the right of the chair lift. They said goodbye to the others and walked over to the top of the trail.

Shade and Ashmore knelt down and allowed the humans to climb onto their backs. As he was mounting Ashmore, Sam saw Jack and Elizabeth walking nearby. "Hey!" he called. "Wanna ride?"

Elizabeth nodded, and ran over. Jack followed. Elizabeth jumped onto Ashmore's back, and Jack floated over to Shade. She wrapped her appendages around Shade's back and dimmed her fire as low as he could.

"Alright!" Sam yelled. "Let's go!"

The dragons ran forward until they had picked up enough speed, and then jumped.

But this time, they didn't take off. Instead, they tucked their wings and legs into their bodies, making themselves as aerodynamic as possible. They hit the snow and began to slide along it at high speeds, leaving a trail behind them.

They sped down the slope, angling themselves around turns and spraying snow behind them. Matt gripped Shade's scaly shoulders tightly; the saddle was holding him in, but he needed to lean forward as well.

"Whoo!" he yelled. He was having a blast. From behind him, he could sense waves of joy coming from Jack. He heard Shade roar in excitement as they began to pass ahead of Sam, Ashmore and Elizabeth.

"Yeah!" he yelled. "Suck on that, bitches!"

"Oh, so it's a race you want?" Sam asked. "Well it's a race you've got!" Ashmore snorted, and went faster, pulling ahead of Shade.

"Oh no you don't!" Matt yelled as he felt Shade go faster. They turned around a bend, and Shade pulled ahead, simultaneously spraying snow all over Sam, Ashmore and Elizabeth.

Matt turned back to see a very unimpressed-looking Sam. He cracked up with laughter.

Ahead of them, the trail merged onto Northwest Passage, a much easier trail. "Alright Shade," Matt said in the dragon's ear. "We've got to keep up our speed on this one."

Shade grunted in response, and sped up. Unfortunately for them, Ashmore did as well, and bolted ahead of them, spraying snow in their faces.

"Son of a bitch!" Matt yelled as he wiped the cold, wet powder off of his face.

"Ha ha!" Sam yelled.

Matt flipped him off as they kept going. They continued like this for several more minutes, each occasionally edging ahead of each other, until they finally reached a fork in the road.

They were entering the novice area, which connected the main mountain to Bear Peak. As they passed Ashmore and an empty chair lift, Matt directed Shade to Far Out, the trail all the way to the left. On that trail was a pass that cut across to Bear Peak.

"Now get as much speed as you can," Matt said. "Things get really flat up ahead."

Shade grunted, and sped up even more. Matt was amazed at how well he was doing; they were going almost just as fast as they had been when they had started. "Come on, we can do this!" he urged. Behind him, they could both feel Jack cheering the dragon on.

They sped down the slope until they reached the trail that cut across to Bear Peak. They turned into it, and went down the slope until it flattened out. They sped across the bridge and across the flats beyond. The abandoned houses passed by in almost a blur, and at first, Matt thought they would make it.

But then Shade began to slow down.

Desperately, the dragon tried to pick up his speed, but it was no use. He was all out of momentum. Finally, they came to a stop.

"Damn it!" Matt cursed. Beside them, Ashmore skidded by, going much slower than before but still traveling. "Sucks to be you!" Sam yelled. They finally pulled to a stop about twenty feet in front of them.

Matt slid off of Shade into the snow. It was incredibly deep here, and almost went up to his hips. He was glad he had found some snow pants while scavenging.

The three of them walked over to Ashmore, Sam and Elizabeth. "That was the greatest thing ever!" Matt yelled.

"Yes!" Sam exclaimed, laughing. "We have to do that again before we leave!"

"I agree!" Sam replied. "Alright, let's fly the rest of the way."

Matt nodded, and they climbed back onto the dragons and took off.

Meanwhile, Trent, Ben and Alena were walking along the summit. The first stretch of the summit was long, and connected to several other trails, before it turned onto the last one. They had just reached that point.

"So, do you think it would be down there?" asked Alena.

"Possibly," said Trent. "Let's go look."

They walked down the trail, all the way to the steep drop that led

forward and onto both Ptarmigan and Saco.

"I'd say this qualifies as the end of the summit," said Ben.

"Yeah," Trent agreed. "I doubt that if it's on the summit it'd be any further than this."

"Do you even know what you're looking for?" asked Ben.

"Yeah," Trent replied. "A lab."

"No, I mean, what signs are you looking for? How are you going to know when you find it?"

Trent shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "I guess we'll see when we do."

Alena sighed. "That's gonna take forever," she said.

"This was horribly thought out," Ben observed.

"Yeah," Trent replied. "But oh well. There's only so many places it could be, right?"

Alena sighed. "I wish I could share your confidence."

"Come on, we'll find it."

"Yes," Ben agreed. "But the question is: will we find it today? Or even this week?"

As the next hour passed completely uneventfully, his confidence did nothing but get worse.

Alex, meanwhile, was walking along the summit for the umpteenth time. He was alone, although earlier he had walked with others. They were all on the lookout for anything that they had missed.

This is bullshit, he thought.

He spotted Anthony up ahead, and went to talk to him.

"Hey, what's up?" he asked.

"Not much, man. Just doing this bullshit lab-searching."

"Tell me about it. It's been hours and we haven't found jack."

They kept walking along, and Alex absentmindedly stared into the woods. "How much longer do you think Trent'll make us look?" he asked.

"Knowing him, probably all day," Anthony replied.

Alex groaned. "Oh my God—| Okay, I like the guy, and he makes awesome music, but he's starting to piss me off."

Suddenly, as he was about to turn away from the woods, something caught his eye. Something he hadn't noticed before. In the snow up ahead was an unnatural-looking dip.

He frowned. "Hold on a minute," he said. He walked over to it and knelt down to examine it. It was about an inch deep, but it sloped down gradually, which was why nobody had noticed it before. It was roughly an elliptical shape, although not quite. He looked ahead, and saw that there was another one leading into the woods.

"Anthony," he said. "What does this look like to you?"

"I'm not sureâ€|" he said. Then it came to him. "Wait a minuteâ€|" Is thatâ€|" a footprint?"

Alex grinned. "I think it might be." He turned around, cupped his hands around his mouth, and yelled, "Guys! I think we found something!"

Those near them came running, and others out of sight weren't far behind. Only a minute passed before everyone was gathered around them.

"What is it?" asked Trent. "What did you find?"

Alex pointed to what he thought was the footprint. "This," he said. "I don't know about you, but that looks a lot like a footprint to me."

Trent's eyes widened, and he smiled. He patted Alex and Anthony both on the back. "Great job, guys!" he exclaimed. "Come on, let's go!"

"Jeez, someone's bossy today," Anthony grumbled.

"I'm gonna ignore that," Trent stated humorously. He led the way into the woods beyond the supposed footprint.

As he followed, Alex realized he had been right. More indents were present beyond the first, and they formed a faded yet distinct trail. They were footprints. Someone had been here, though from the looks of it, not for a while.

"I think this might be it," said Andrew.

"Hey, don't say that yet," said Alex. "You'll jinx it."

They followed the trail deep into the woods. They must've been walking for at least fifteen minutes before they finally came to the end of the trail.

"What theâ€|" Alex gasped. In front of them was a strange sight.

The trail just disappeared.

Trent walked forward and stepped in front of the area where the tracks disappeared. He instantly noticed something strange; the snow was much shallower here. The earth had risen up in a large mound.

He took another step, and the snow got even less deep. Finally, he took a final step, and reached the mound's peak.

"Reuniclus!" Trent called. When he saw the PokÃ©mon, he asked, "Could

you scrape off this snow for me?"

"__Sure,"_ she replied. The snow began to scrape itself from the mound and pile up in a ring around it. Finally, the mound was completely uncovered. It was made completely of dirt.

"Reuniclus," Trent requested again. "Could you push this dirt off?"

Reuniclus nodded, and the dirt began sliding off in the same fashion as the snow. Finally, when the dirt had formed a ring around them, and the mound had become flat, something was uncovered.

It looked like a metal handle.

Trent ran to it, gripped onto it, and pulled. He gritted his teeth and yanked with all of his might. It started to move, but before he could lift it, his strength gave out.

"Someone help me," he requested. Alex, who was closest, ran forward and gripped the latch. It was freezing cold, and seemed to bit his bare hands, but he ignored the pain.

"Alright," he said. "Let's go."

They pulled on the handle as hard as they could. There was some resistance at first, but then it opened smoothly. They let go, and it fell to the ground on the other side.

The group gathered around the hole in the ground that was now revealed. Inside was a metal tunnel leading down into darkness. A ladder clung to the inside.

Trent reached into his pocket and pulled out his flashlight. He switched it on and pointed it down the tunnel, illuminating the bottom. It must have been three stories down.

"I'll scout it out," he said. He turned around and lowered himself into the hole, stepping on the top rung of the ladder. He held his flashlight in one hand and gripped onto the ladder with the other. As he made his way down, he looked beneath him, watching for faults in the ladder.

When he reached the bottom, he shined the light down the tunnel. "There's a door here!" he called. "Come down!"

Alex went next. "Can I get some light?" he asked. Trent nodded, and pointed the light back on the ladder. With the illumination, he was able to focus on his climbing.

The ladder was in good shape, and he was able to make it to the bottom quickly. When he reached it, Ben followed from above, followed by Anthony.

"That's all the room we've got," Trent observed. "We've got to get this door open."

They turned to face the door, a large, metal one with two locks; an electronic keypad lock and a regular lock. The electronic lock wasn't a problem, because the power was out. But the other lock was.

Trent had an idea. "Reuniclus!" he yelled. "Could you come down here for a moment?"

"__Sure!"_ The Pokémon floated down into the hole.

"I hate to keep asking you to do things, but do you think you could unlock this door for us?" Trent asked.

"__Yeah, I can do that," _she replied. _"And it's okay."_ She focused her energy, and probed the lock, searching for the mechanism that unlocked it. Finally, she found it, and they heard a click.

"__That should do it,"_ she announced.

Trent approached the door and opened it. Beyond was a pitch black room. He shined his flashlight inside and it revealed a small foyer, with a coat rack, a closet, and other such things. Two doors led off from it on either side.

"Hey, guys!" he yelled up the hole. "Come down! We got in! Also, Samantha! Radio the others for me, would you?"

One by one, the others came down the ladder. When they were all down, they proceeded into the room, desperate to get out of the cramped hallway.

"Alright, we found it!" Andrew exclaimed.

"Let's look through it, then," Trent suggested. He walked over to the door to the left and opened it, shining his flashlight in. The beam revealed an empty kitchen, complete with a refrigerator, a stove, an oven, a toaster, a microwave, and a table. Two more doors led off of this one.

"It looks like this place was built to live in, not just work," Trent observed to the others. He entered the kitchen, and the others followed. He went to the first door and opened it, revealing a pantry full of old food.

"Nothing in here," he said. He closed the door and went to the next one, which revealed a bedroom. There was a nightstand with a digital clock and a lamp, next to a dusty yet fancy bed. The covers were ruffled, signifying that someone had slept there, although from the amount of dust coating them, not anytime recently.

Then, he saw the thing he had been looking for. A computer.

"Lily!" he called. "Come here for a minute!"

The spider made her way past the others in the doorway and approached Trent. "Could you power this for me?" he asked. She nodded, and began to pump energy into the machine.

The monitor sprung to life as it began loading the system. Finally, when it was fully loaded, a screensaver depicting a magnified strand of DNA came up. Trent frowned. "That's weirdâ€¦" he said. "There's no protectionâ€¦"

"Maybe they thought nobody would be able to get in except whoever was living here?" Anthony suggested.

Trent shook his head. "They usually have so much more protection than thisâ€¦"

He clicked the "My Computer" icon on the desktop, and a window appeared. He ran a search for text files.

There was only one result. It was titled, "If You're Reading This, Help."

What theâ€¦ he thought. He double-clicked it, and a word processor he had never heard of before opened. He began to read through the fileâ€¦ And was completely unprepared for what it said.

This is what it read:

I don't know how you're reading this, but it must mean that somehow you've powered my computer. I know that the chances of that happening are incredibly slim, most likely impossible. But I'm going to try anyway, as it could potentially save my life.

My name is Dr. Emily Shaw. The date is January 2nd, 2015. Almost eight months have passed since that terrible day, the one they call Z-Day. I wish I could tell you everything that is going on, but I can't. There is a good chance that they'll come here, and I cannot risk letting them know how much I have discovered. Even if I fail at what I'm about to do, I might be able to try again later.

I worked for the government, more specifically, the Department of Science. It was the one federal department nobody knew of, because we kept it hidden. Our work was too controversial for the public to know about, but it was too important for us to give up.

Or so I thought.

I was in on the whole conspiracy. When I reached the upper echelons of the organization, I helped keep it a secret from the public. The secrets ran deeper than you could ever have imagined.

I joined this organization because I wanted to help the world. I wanted to help advance the human race, and I thought that's what my superiors wanted as well. But I was wrong.

When I reached those upper echelons, I was allowed into the most secretive areas. They were protected with so much security, I had always wondered what could be down there. What I found was horrible.

The scientists I had looked up to were revealed to be monsters. And organization that had started out as a potentially world-saving notion had become riddled with evil and corruption. They genetically engineered things solely because they could, and while I had no real objections to this, the creatures they produced were locked away. They were abused in unspeakable manners, and while I'm no animal-rights activist, I'd be a complete liar if I said I wasn't horrified.

_I know many of my coworkers agreed with me, but nobody ever said a

word. They were too afraid of what their bosses would do to them. And they were sworn to secrecy; if anybody so much as mentioned a word to a civilian, they would be imprisoned for life. And so the torture continued, unchallenged._

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I began to act out, challenging my superiors and coworkers, and sabotaging their sadistic experiments. Finally, this caught up to me. They tried to arrest me for sabotage, but they could prove nothing, for I had covered my tracks too well. So they tried to fire me, but they were afraid that I would talk. They just couldn't take that chance. So they did the next best thing, and demoted me.

Things went like that for a few months. Then, there was Z-Day. I honestly can say I saw that one coming. When I had first heard of those experiments, I thought it was a good idea. But the more I learned, the more I realized how foolish it was. I knew we were playing with fire, and I tried to warn them, but they wouldn't listen.

When Z-Day arrived, however, even I didn't fully realize the consequences. I thought they'd be able to contain it in the end, and while a lot of people would die, things would be okay in the end. When it broke out, I saw my chance to try and bring them down, and I took it, consequences be damned. I went to the press, and blew the lid on their operation.

Unfortunately, it was too late. Things had gotten out of hand, and nobody was able to fix it. The world ended.

But the story didn't. At first, I just made my way back here and survived here for a while. But one day, while I was out hunting, something happened.

While I was out, someone had broken in. I'm not sure how they broke in, but they did. They took all of my supplies and wiped my hard-drive clean.

I knew it as soon as I saw what had happened. The Department was still intact. And that could only mean that they were up to no good.

I decided to get to the bottom of it. I traveled to the lab in Concord, and used a generator to power it. I spent days looking for answers, until I finally found them. But my search led me to a horrifying revelation.

I can't tell you what I found right now, but it's bad. The conspiracy went far deeper than even I could have imagined. I knew I had to act, so I dug deeper.

The key to all of this is the Machine. It was this device that they built somewhere that has the power to wipe out the zombies. But only those on top of the ladder knew the full story, and they weren't very big on sharing. But I think I might have finally found out where it is.

I spent the next month or so doing further research in an attempt to confirm this information. I even went to Aperture, the lab in Manchester. I barely made it out alive.

Now, I've run out of time. They've caught on to my snooping. I have no idea how, but that doesn't change the facts. I've managed to continue my research for about a week, but I can't afford to do so any longer. I'm leaving today.

Boston. That's where I'm going. That's where the Machine is. If you're reading this, it means that I'm in trouble. If it's not too late, you must come. But be careful. It will be guarded heavily.

Good luck. I'll see you soon. If we survive.

Trent sat back, speechless. "Oh my Godâ€¦" he said.

"What?" asked Andrew. "What does it say?"

Trent stood up, blinking in shock, overwhelmed by what he had read.

"She was here," he said softly. "And she was the One Who Came Before. She found it. She found the Machine."

"What?" Ben asked in awe. "Where is it?"

Trent chuckled. "You know, it's funny," he said. "This whole time, I thought it was here, in New Hampshire. But it's not. It was somewhere else."

"Well?" asked Alex. "Tell us!"

"Boston," Trent replied. "It's in Boston. That's where we need to go next. And if we're lucky, that's where it will all end."

46. Chapter 45: The Shape of Things to Come

****Hey guys! Not much new to announce today. But here's the new chapter!****

****Let me know what you think!****

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*** * ***

<p>Chapter Forty-Five:

****The Shape of Things to Come****

****Bartlett, New Hampshire****

"Boston?" asked Andrew. "We're gonna have to go through the wall?"

"No," Ben said with determination. "No way in hell I'm going in there again. I almost died!"

"Don't worry, we're not going through anything," Trent reassured.

"We've got a dragon that can fly this time. Two, in fact."

"Good," said Ben. "That was literally the worst thing that's happened to me since Z-Day."

"Even worse than losing your finger?" asked Andrew.

"Shut the fuck up."

"So that's that then?" asked Samantha. "We found it?"

"It's not a hundred percent yet," Trent explained. "So no. We aren't done yet until we see it for ourselves. I say we go home, rest up, and head out tomorrow. Who's with me?"

There were no objections. The decision was unanimous. They just wanted it to be over with.

"Alright," said Trent. "Let's go find the others and get out of here."

Lily cut power to the computer, and they headed for the entrance. Suddenly, as they were halfway to the door, they heard a noise.

It was a terrible, high-pitched shrieking coming from the tunnel. It sounded like a blood-curdling, inhuman scream of agony.

The hair on the back of Trent's neck stood on end.

"What was that?" asked Brian nervously.

"I don't know," Ben replied.

Trent walked to the front door and cautiously opened it. He could tell immediately that something had changed. The light from above was darker, and snow had piled up on the floor of the tunnel. The shrieking noise came again, this time much louder. Trent realized what it was.

It was wind. It blew across the metal opening, creating the sound that they had heard. It was also much colder than it had been before. While it had bitten before, it now gnawed.

Trent walked down the tunnel, grabbed the ladder, and climbed up. As he reached the top, another gust of wind buffeted him, and blew snow into his face. He almost fell from the ladder, but managed to keep his grip.

As the wind died down, he wiped the biting snow off of his face, and his worst fears were confirmed. The wind had disappeared in this one spot, but elsewhere it raged at terrifying speeds. Snow poured from the sky as fast as rain.

It was a blizzard.

He quickly descended the ladder and went back into the lab, shutting the door behind him.

"We're not going anywhere right now," he said. "It's a blizzard."

"Fuck it," said Ben. "Just fuck it."

"Where the hell did it come from?" asked Joey

"Matt and Sam were talking about seeing storm clouds in the distance when I radioed them earlierâ€¦ They didn't think it was a problem though," Samantha explained.

"Well obviously it was!" Brian exclaimed.

"What are we gonna do?" asked Alena.

"Maybe we could try and make a run for it?" Alex suggested.

Trent shook his head. "This is one of the worst blizzards I've ever seen. It's too dangerous, and too cold. We're gonna have to wait it out."

"But what about the others?" asked Samantha. "They're still out there! We can't just wait here while they freeze!"

"They have dragons with them," said Jean. "They have heat."

"Jean's right," Trent agreed. "They'll be okay."

"But-"

"We can't go out there!" Trent exclaimed. "It's too dangerous, and we have no idea where they are anyway!" he sighed and calmed down. "They've been through worse. They'll be okay. You can radio them if you want, to make sure."

"I hope you're right," Samantha replied. She took out her walkie and tried to contact him

****Earlier****

Matt, Sam, Elizabeth, Jack and the dragons were searching Bear Peak.

"Look, there's nothing up here, I'm telling you," Matt exclaimed.

"For the last time, Matt, it's not going to be easy to find!" Sam replied, annoyed.

"For us, yeah!" Matt agreed. "But we've been looking for over an hour, and not even Jack or the dragons have found anything!"

Sam considered this, and looked into the distance as he did. Then, his concentration on his thoughts was broken as he saw something out there.

"Matt," he said. "I think we should head back now."

"What?" Matt asked, following his gaze. "What's- oh."

The storm clouds they had seen earlier were almost upon them, and they were much bigger than they had seemed before.

"That looks bad," he observed.

"Let's go back," Sam suggested. "We should warn the others and hole up in the base lodge."

"As they were about to leave, the walkies on their belts went off. They heard the sound of Samantha's voice.

_"Guys!" _she said. _"We found it! We found the hidden lab!"_

Matt breathed a sigh of relief. "Alright, that's good," he said to Sam. "If the storm comes, they can hole up in there."

Sam nodded and pulled out his walkie. "Alright," he said. "We're on our way. We'll be there soon. But watch out. It's probably nothing, but it's getting pretty cloudy out."

"Alright. Thanks for the warning. See you soon."

Now in a much more confident mood, Matt approached Shade. "What do you say we take a couple more runs before we head back?" he asked him.

Shade nodded and grinned.

Matt turned to Sam "We challenge you to a rematch," he declared.

"Oh, do you now?" Sam asked. "What do you think, Ashmore?" He turned to the larger Night Fury, who grinned and nodded.

"Let's go!" he exclaimed. He hauled himself onto Shade's back. Sam did the same to Ashmore, and the Pok mon joined them as they had before.

Then they were off.

They went on two runs total before they decided to finally head back. First, they went on the long, winding Wandering Skis. Then, they went on the fast, steep Avenger. They had a blast on both of them.

As they were flying back to the summit, they noticed that it was getting darker out. The clouds were blocking out the sun. As they watched, they saw the first few snowflakes begin to fall.

"We need to head back now!" Matt yelled to Sam.

Sam nodded. "Alright! Agreed!"

They landed at the summit. "I think we could pack in one more race," Matt suggested. "How bad can it get in a few minutes?"

Sam shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "I think we've wasted enough time. We need to head back."

"I know," Matt agreed. "I meant how about we race back?"

"I don't know  |"

"Come on," Matt pressured.

Sam caved. "Fine," he relented. "But as soon as it's over we're flying the rest of the way."

Matt nodded. "Deal," he said.

They started their race, going down Morning Star, the easiest way down, which led to the pass. They had a blast- but Matt quickly noticed something disturbing.

The snowfall was getting heavier at a frightening rate, and it might have just been the speed from the race, but he thought he felt wind picking up.

Before long, his vision was covered in white dots. If it snowed any harder, it would be a full-fledged storm.

Please, he thought. _No more. Don't get worse._

But it did get worse. And worse.

By the time they were almost at the pass that connected to Attitash, the wind had turned into a gale. Matt could barely see anything in front of him. His face was going numb from the cold. He had dressed warmly, but hadn't been anticipating something this fierce, so the cold seeped through his jacket and pants and got into his skin.

They needed to get to shelter. He turned around to make sure Elizabeth, who had been riding with him, was still there. She was. Then, he turned back to Shade.

"Hey, do you think you could fly in this?" he yelled.

Shade shook his head.

"Shit!" Matt exclaimed. "This is my fault. I should have listened to Sam."

He hugged himself close to the dragon, hiding himself from the gnawing cold and gusts of wind so powerful they nearly knocked him off.

Finally, they reached the other mountain.

"Turn left here!" Matt yelled. "There are some condos in the woods! We can stay in one!"

Shade turned sharply, and Matt almost fell off. Behind him, Elizabeth did.

Shade felt it, and immediately pulled to a stop. Matt jumped off and landed in the freezing, knee-deep snow.

He squinted against the wind and bitter cold and looked for her. He found her lying in a snowbank, struggling to rise to her feet. He stumbled over to her and helped her out. "Come on," he said. "We're almost there."

Then he noticed that they were alone.

"Guys," he said. "Guys! Where are the others?"

They looked around, searching for them, or even a trail, but they found nothing.

"Sam!" Matt yelled. "Ashmore! Jack! Where are you?"

There was no response. Matt started to run back the way they had come, desperate to find their friends. But he was stopped by Shade, who ran in front of him, blocking his way.

"Come on, Shade!" he yelled. "What are you doing? We have to find him!"

Shade glared at him, narrowing his emerald eyes. The message in them was unmistakable.

No.

"Why not?" Matt protested. "Sam could freeze out there!"

And then he knew why. If Sam could freeze, he could too. Shade was protecting him.

"Fine," he said. "Let's find shelter."

Shade nodded and lowered himself, allowing Matt and Elizabeth to climb onto his back. Then, he started to run through the blinding gales. Finally, a building came into sight. Shade ran up to it and stopped next to the door. Matt jumped off and tried to open it, only to find it locked.

He stepped back, raised his leg and kicked the door as hard as he could. It budged, but didn't open. He was about to repeat this action, when Elizabeth stepped up.

She pushed him aside and stepped back about ten feet from the door. Then, she ran towards it, jumped up in the air, and stuck out her leg. Her foot collided with the door and it snapped off of its hinges and flew backwards, colliding with the wall behind. She landed on her feet and fell forward, dropping to one knee and planting her palms on the ground.

"Thanks!" Matt exclaimed. He entered the house and Shade followed.

The house was freezing. But it was dry, and slightly warmer than the outside air. Matt pulled down his hood and Elizabeth did the same.

The wind howled around the house, and snow was coming in through the doorway.

"You two stay here," Matt requested. He turned back to the door, when a growl from Shade stopped him in his tracks.

Matt turned back to face him. "I need to go find them," he said. "I won't just stand around while they're freezing!"

Shade, eyes slitted, walked over to him. Matt held his ground, albeit nervously. Realizing he was getting nowhere, Shade changed tactics. His expression turned to a much more sympathetic one. His slitted pupils returned to their normal, rounded shape. He warbled, and gestured to himself, then out the door.

I'll go.

"Okay, fine," said Matt. "I'll go with you."

Shade shook his head.

"Yes!" Matt argued. "I don't want you to get hurt out there!"

Shade looked at him in bewilderment. _Really? You're worried about me_ in the cold?_

"Justâ€¦ Please, let me help! Two pairs of eyes are better than one!"

Shade shook his head and gently nudged him out of the way.

As Matt watched him leave, a feeling of disappointment filled him. "Damnit!" he cursed.

He turned to Elizabeth and said, "Come on, let's find some blankets we can use to get warm."

Elizabeth nodded, and they began searching. On the other side of the ground floor, they found a bedroom, scouted out the rest of the house, and returned to it. It was a large, master bedroom, with a bed in the center, a nightstand on either side, a walk-in closet and a big TV. It was also lined with windows.

They stripped the bed of its sheets and sat down in a corner. They wrapped the blankets around themselves, and pressed themselves close together to stay warm.

It was warmer and drier here, and as the wind howled around the house, shaking its very foundation, Matt reflected that they were much better off.

But that only made him worry about the others more.

They sat there, waiting for the storm to stop, or for Shade to return. Whichever came first.

****Earlier****

As they were in the trails in the woods, Ashmore, Sam and Jack had managed to stay with the others, until the storm really began to pick up.

By now, Ashmore could barely see ten feet in front of him. He was no longer following Shade; only his trail.

Suddenly, ahead of them, a tree came into his field of view. He just barely had enough room to dodge it. Turning sharply, and sending snow flying, he just barely avoided it. But something worse happened.

He heard a yell, and felt the weight on his back disappear. With a roar of shock, Ashmore pulled to a stop so hard it made him roll over. When he came back right side up, he steadied himself, and then sprung to his feet, simultaneously looking for Sam. He saw the human tumbling through the snow, before finally landing in a running creek. Sam tumbled into the water with a splash and laid still.

"No!" Ashmore yelled. He bounded over to the boy, who lay unmoving in the water. As the Night Fury sniffed his body, he realized he was unconscious; he had fallen into the water and had hit his head on a rock.

"Oh God," said Ashmore. "Oh God, no!" Fighting back panic, he thought of what he could do. Sam was still alive- as Ashmore knelt his head to Sam's face, he could feel a faint breath. But he was in trouble. The ice cold water was seeping into his clothes and soaking his skin, stealing away any warmth he had left.

Ashmore extended his teeth and bit down on the wet jacket. Carefully, he dragged Sam out of the water back into the snow. Unfortunately, this also brought him back into the howling, razor-sharp wind.

He wasn't sure what to do now. Sam needed shelter, and Shade's trail was disappearing fast. They needed to move.

But

Sam had hit his head really hard. So hard that it had drawn blood. Ashmore was no expert, but he thought he remembered something Sam had said once while giving Elizabeth First Aid. It could be dangerous to move an unconscious person. It could do permanent damage, and Ashmore didn't want to risk it.

As he looked behind him, he also realized that Shade's trail was now completely gone. If they followed it, they would risk getting lost.

But one thing was for sure; he couldn't just leave Sam like this. He laid down in the cold snow next to him and grabbed him with his forelegs. Drawing the boy into an embrace, he wrapped his wings around him, giving a seemingly endless supply of warmth.

He waited. For what, he wasn't sure. For someone to find them? For Sam to wake up? For the storm to blow over? Any of them would be wonderful.

As he waited, keeping his head low to shield his eyes from the icy wind, something occurred to him. He had forgotten about Jack.

He stuck his head up and looked around for her. She was nowhere to be seen.

"Jack!" he yelled. "Are you there?"

There was no response. Not even a mysterious wave of emotion. If she was here, she didn't want him to know.

He groaned, and put his head back down. The wind was buffeting his body, and even he, a Night Fury dragon, was feeling the cold a little bit. He lifted his wing and stuck his head beneath it.

He stayed like this for a while. There was no change in Sam's condition, save for his wound clotting up. After a while, Ashmore was starting to fall asleep.

No, he thought. _I can't sleep!_ He mentally jerked himself back awake.

Suddenly, he heard something calling from the chaotic fury of the blizzard. A voice. It was very faint, but he could just make out what it was saying.

"Ashmore!"

His head shot up, back into the gale. The light reflecting off of the snow blinded him, and he blinked several times to adjust his eyes to it. Before they were fully adjusted, a large, dark shape began to emerge from the storm. As they adjusted further, he realized it was Shade.

"Ashmore!" the smaller dragon yelled, running up to him. "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

Ashmore nodded. "Yeah!" he replied. "But Sam isn't! He hit his head! It knocked him out! I didn't know what to do, I wasn't sure if moving him would be a good idea! I thought it might hurt him! And I had lost your trail!"

"That doesn't matter anymore!" Shade explained. "We need to get you two inside! Me, Matt and Elizabeth found an old abandoned house down the trail! Now where's Jack?"

"I don't know," Ashmore admitted. "She disappeared."

Shade sighed. "Alright, I'll see if I can find her. Both of you stay here!"

As Shade walked off, he faded out of Ashmore's sight, into the white void. Ashmore tucked his head back under his wing to keep it warm. He was in no danger of freezing, but it was still uncomfortable.

Several minutes passed, and Ashmore lost track of time. He almost drifted off a couple more times, but each time he forced himself to stay awake. It was becoming harder and harder to fight it.

Come on, Shade, he thought. _Hurry up!_

He looked down at Sam's unmoving body, and prayed for him to awaken.

Finally, a few minutes later, he couldn't hold back anymore. He dozed off.

When he awoke, panic gripped him. _Oh God,_ he thought. _How long have I been out?_

What if he had missed something? What if Sam had needed him, only to find him asleep? What if he had died?

One look at the boy told the dragon that he was okay. Or, at least, still alive. His initial panic out of the way, Ashmore became aware of a much more serious problem. Something cold was pressing against the back of his neck, and it wasn't the wind or snow. It was something hard.

Something metal.

In his initial panic, he had failed to sense the figure approaching him from behind. Now, it was too late, and he was at the mercy of the gun behind him.

No, he thought as he faced the prospect of his death. _No, it can't end like this!_

Jack had been separated from the group a while ago. One minute, she had been riding with Sam and Ashmore, the next, she had lost her grip and fallen off. Using her abilities, she had been able to keep herself from falling, but she hadn't been able to catch up in time.

She began following their trails, but this was before the blizzard had reached its full strength. When it finally did, she became disoriented. She had never been in a situation where she couldn't see well before. This was new to her, and because of that, she lost the trail she was following.

Now what? she thought. The blizzard didn't pose a threat to her; she was immune to the cold. But getting lost did.

First things first, she thought. She became invisible, so that the snow passed through her body instead of buffeting it. Then, she set out to find the others.

For almost a half hour, she wandered, hoping to pick up a trail again. Her travels took her all the way to the other mountain and back, but she found nothing. Finally, she realized she had been going the wrong way the whole time. She managed to find the general area in which she had first gotten lost, and then pinpointed the direction the others had gone in. She slowly followed it, praying that there would be no fork in the road. The trail they had left was gone now, and she had only her memory and judgment to rely on.

After a few minutes of this, something caught her eye in the haze ahead. A large, black shape lying in the snow. A Night Fury.

Excitedly, she materialized to reveal her presence to him. But as she got closer, she realized two things. One, that it was Ashmore, and two, Someone was standing next to him.

At first, she thought it was Sam. But as she got closer, she saw a glint of light off of metal from something in their hand. A gun, held up to Ashmore's neck.

She had to help him.

Without hesitating, she sent a wave of pure hatred at the assailant, trying to distract him. It worked. The figure doubled over in shock, then looked towards her.

Jack rushed forward. _Go away!_ She thought, sending out the feeling. Meanwhile, Ashmore began to stir.

As Jack flew, she shot out her fire towards the assailant, sending them reeling backwards in shock. They must have realized the helplessness of their situation, because they turned tail and fled. Jack tried to give chase, but she was too late. They had been swallowed by the storm.

Jack floated over to Ashmore, radiating concern. Ashmore looked up at her and said, "Thanks! I thought I was done for!"

Are you okay?

Ashmore nodded. "Yeah," he said. "But Sam isn't. He hit his head."

We need to get him out of here.

Ashmore shook his head. "Shade's still out here!" he said. "He went to look for you!"

Jack felt a wave of irritation and impatience. _Come on, Shade,_ she thought.

Suddenly, they both heard a muffled moan coming from underneath Ashmore's wing. He lifted it slightly so that they could see beneath it.

Sam was waking up.

Jack floated closer, as Ashmore moved his head to shield him from the wind.

Sam opened his eyes and looked at them, confused. He felt the back of his head and asked, "What happened?"

Using images, Jack explained what she knew of what happened. Sam's eyes widened in shock. "Who was it that attacked you?" he asked. "Did you get a good look at him?"

Ashmore shook his head. He looked at Jack questioningly, and she shook hers as well.

He sighed in frustration. Then, something came to him, and he sat up suddenly.

"Shade!" he exclaimed. "You said he went to find you, Jack! That means he's still out there, with whoever it was that tried to kill Ashmore!"

Jack felt a twinge of panic. He was right. From Ashmore's expression, she could tell he was feeling the same.

But their fears were soon put to rest. "Oh, good!" a voice from behind them yelled. "You found her!"

They turned to see the smaller dragon appearing out of the void. Jack rushed over to greet him, relieved.

"Shade!" Ashmore yelled. "Thank God you're okay!"

Shade trotted over to them and frowned in confusion. "What do you mean? Did something happen?" He saw Sam and said, "Hey! He's awake!"

Sam grinned at Shade. "Hey," he said.

"I'll tell you everything on the way," said Ashmore. "We need to get to this house, now!"

They made their way through the storm. Shade and Ashmore charged through it at full speed, with Sam riding on Ashmore and Jack holding onto Shade. On the way, Ashmore told Shade everything that had happened.

"Oh no," said Shade. "I left Matt and Elizabeth on their own!"

"I wouldn't worry about them that much!" Ashmore reassured. "They can take care of themselves easily!" Still, they were both worried.

They arrived at the house and jumbled inside as fast as they could, longing to be out of the storm. Upon their arrival, Matt and Elizabeth appeared from the other room. "Guys!" Matt exclaimed, rushing forward to meet them. "We were getting really worried about you! You've been gone for a long time!"

"We're alright," said Sam weakly. "Mostly."

Matt saw his wounded head and gasped. "We need to get you patched up," he commented. "Did you bring the First Aid kit?"

Sam nodded, then cursed himself and shook his head. "I left it with the others."

"Damn," Matt swore. "Oh well, looks like the bleeding's stopped. Come on, guys, we've got some blankets set up. Let's go there and warm up."

They followed Matt and Elizabeth into the bedroom and huddled together in the corner. Between Jack and the dragons, they were more than warm enough.

For the rest of the storm, they stayed there, keeping alert and listening for any sign that whoever had tried to kill Ashmore was back.

Finally, after a few hours, the storm came to an end.

Wasting no time, they went outside. The snowfall had been reduced to nothing but a light sprinkling.

"Is it over?" Matt asked tentatively.

Sam pointed up into the sky at a break in the clouds that was on its way. "I'd say so," he said.

"We need to get to the others," Matt announced. "And then we need to get out of here."

Sam nodded. "Agreed," he said. "Let's go."

They got onto the dragons, who flew them to the top of the mountain. Once there, they landed in the snow, which now reached up to the tops of their hips. They slowly waded through it, looking for something that revealed where the others had gone.

Ahead, they saw someone emerging from the trees. It was Trent.

"Trent!" Matt yelled.

The man looked up, and his face lit up at the sight of them. "You're alright!" he yelled. He turned around. "Guys! They're back!"

They struggled through the deep snow towards each other. Behind Trent came all of the others. After a while, they finally met each other halfway.

"We tried to call you on the walkies!" Trent exclaimed. "Why didn't you answer? What happened?"

Matt felt around his belt for his walkie, but it wasn't there. "Shit," he swore. "I think I lost it."

Beside him, Sam felt for his. "Crap! Me too."

Trent grinned. "Whatever," he said. "We have more. The important thing is that you're okay."

"What happened to you anyway?" asked Ben.

"We'll tell you when we get back," Matt replied. "We need to leave. Did you find what you needed?"

Trent nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Why the rush?"

"Because there's someone else on this mountain," Matt replied. "And they don't like visitors."

The dragons started to ferry them down the mountain. Once they were all there, Matt and Sam climbed onto them, and the others got into their cars. When they were all ready, they left.

Despite all that had happened, a feeling of victory was present. They had found what they had come for, and it looked as if the end was in sight. But beneath that, there was a lingering apprehension of what was to come.

47. Chapter Forty-Six: Captivity

****At last! I am back!****

****So, that took longer than I had anticipated. I've been very busy, to be honest. But I'm finally ready to continue posting chapters!****

****Here's 46. 47 will be posted Wednesday, and 48-50 will be posted**

all at once next Sunday.**

* * *

><p>Chapter Forty-Six:

Captivity

Lyndrich, New Hampshire

As soon as they got back, everyone met at Sam's house. As Matt started to treat Sam's wound, they shared stories.

"So we're going to Boston?" asked Nick afterwards.

"Looks like," said Alena.

"Wait, we're just gonna walk in there?" asked Nick. "You just said it; there are probably guards all over the place!"

"Well is there any other way of doing it?" asked Trent.

"Yeah," Brian said. "If there's people there, they'll set the Machine off at some point, right? Now look, I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm getting tired of getting led into dangerous situations on this _insane_ quest. Why can't we just stay here and wait this one out? Just this once?"

A thick silence hung in the air over them. Many of the group found themselves agreeing with Brian's rant. But before too many of them did, Trent spoke up.

"If they're in Boston, and guarding the Machine," he began. "Why haven't they set it off yet?"

"Maybe they're waiting for something?" asked Anthony.

"What could they possibly be waiting for?" asked Trent. "The apocalypse? Already happened! No, they're either not going to use it, or they're up to something. And we can't just sit around and do nothing about it."

Brian tried to think of an argument, but couldn't. Finally, he said, "Fine. I'll go with you this one last time. But once this is all over, I'm done."

"Me too," Nick agreed. "I've seen enough action to last a lifetime."

"I completely agree with that," said Trent. "Once this is done, it'll be done for good."

They talked for a bit longer, deciding that they would leave in two days' time. Then, they exchanged their other stories. Those who had stayed behind had been faced with an uneventful day, save for some snow. Sam then told them about being caught in the blizzard and the mysterious assailant who had attacked them.

After another hour or two, the group broke up. As Ben drove Trent, Anthony and Alena home, something nagged at the back of his head. But

he couldn't put his finger on what. Every time he came close, the thought maddeningly slipped away.

When they reached his house, the four of them exited the car and walked up to the door. Ben unlocked the door and let them in.

"Well, I'm exhausted," Trent announced. "I'm going to bed. Good night!"

"Night!" Ben yelled after him as the man ascended the stairs.

"I need a drink," said Anthony. "You want to join me?"

"Nah, not now," Ben replied. "I wanna make a broadcast."

"You want me to wait up here?" asked Alena.

"If you want to. I don't care."

Alena stayed upstairs while Ben went down into the basement. He set up the transmitter and hooked it up to the laptop. As the laptop booted up, he thought about what he was going to say.

When it was fully booted, he ran the program that started the radio broadcast. Once it was running, he started talking.

"Hey guys!" he exclaimed. "I hope you're doing alright. That is, if you even exist. Well, if you do, just hold tight. You've only got to survive a little bit longer. This whole thing might finally be over soon."

He paused for a moment to think about what he should say next.

"I really don't think I should say anything else about that. Not over the air. It's too dangerous.

"Anyway, did you guys get hit by that storm earlier? I was up north, when out of nowhere a massive blizzard came! One of the most intense I've ever seen! It looks like it snowed down here, too. Nobody really talked about it that much, so I guess it wasn't that big. I don't knowâ€¦"

He talked for a bit longer about everything that had been going on-leaving out the exceptionally crazy stuff, of course. He talked about his life in Lyndrich, his relationship with Alena, everything-putting a humorous spin on it, of course.

Finally, when it was time for him to go, he finished.

"Alright, I've got to get going," he said. "Don't die on me, alright?"

He paused. This was the part he had been dreading. With all that had been going on, he didn't think it was safe to broadcast his station anymore. Not with the army knowing where they were. It would be wise to attract as little attention as possible.

"I think this might be goodbye, guys," he finally said. "Not forever, but for now. For reasons I can't even begin to describe, I don't think it's safe to broadcast anymore. I'm gonna say goodbye, play

music for the rest of the night, and then I'll be gone for a while."

He was quiet for a moment. He knew what he had to do- he had just said it- but he had a hard time bringing himself to actually do it.

"This is Ben, signing off. Now here's some music. Goodbye."

He switched off the microphone and turned on the music. The haunting melodies of Killswitch Engage's "This Fire" filled the room.

He felt arms wrap around him, and lips kissing his cheek. "Alena?" he asked.

"Nope, Anthony," she replied jokingly.

"Alright, I'm out," Ben replied.

Alena laughed and handed him a bottle of vodka. He accepted it and took a swig.

"You okay?" she asked. "You seem nervous."

"I am," he replied.

"About Boston?"

Ben nodded.

"I am tooâ€¦ we could _die_ in there."

"Not helping."

"I knowâ€¦ sorry. But alsoâ€¦ think about it like this. If we succeed, there will be no more zombies! The world will be safe again! We can be together and not have to worry anymore!"

"There's still the army to worry about," Ben reminded her.

"Wellâ€¦ one thing at a time. We can go somewhere else maybe; somewhere they can't find us," she suggested.

"And just leave Lucas behind to die?" Ben asked. "No. We can't do that; not until we know whether he's safe or not."

"Ben, you only knew him for a week or two," Alena persisted. "I know his situations sucks, but you don't owe him anything."

"He could say the same about you," Ben replied. "And I'd go after you no matter what."

"Well he's not your girlfriend," Alena pointed out.

"True," Ben replied. "But he saved my life. I do owe him something."

Realizing she wasn't getting anywhere, Alena stopped arguing. "Okay, fine," she said.

"There's something that's bothering me about this whole thing, though," Ben admitted. "Something feelsâ€¦| wrong about it. I just don't know what."

"Maybe it's just nerves?" Alena suggested.

"Yeahâ€¦| I hope so," Ben replied. "So anyway, when do you want me to drive you home tonight? I want an idea of how long we're going to be together."

Alena leaned into him and slid her hand across his chest. "Actually, I was thinking of staying here tonight. If that's okay with you."

Ben put down his drink and started for the stairs. "Let's go," he said.

Alena followed him, grinning mischievously.

The next day, Nick woke up early in the morning.

He had had a nightmare. It was about Z-Day again. It was always about Z-Day, or about his time in the army.

He sighed and got out of bed. He wanted downstairs and into the kitchen of Evan's house and rummaged through his food. Finding some leftover salted meat, he took a good-sized portion out and went to start a fire in the fireplace.

Once that was done, he went back for the meat and impaled it with a stick, holding it over the fire and roasting it.

When it was finished, he returned to the kitchen and started eating.

"Hey Nick," a voice said from the kitchen doorway. He looked up and saw Evan, who had been drawn downstairs by the smell of cooking meat. "Good morning."

"Good morning Evan," he said, before taking another bite of the meat. "There's a fire going if you want to make your own."

Evan nodded, walked over to the meat, and cut himself a piece. Then, he went into the other room and dumped it into the fire.

"It's cooking now!" he called.

"Congratulations!" Nick replied sarcastically

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Nick looked towards it, and wondered who it could be. Usually people weren't visiting this early. Slowly, he got up and walked over to a window.

"Noâ€¦|" he said. "No, it can't be!"

He walked to the door and opened it. Lucas was standing at the door, bruised and covered in dried blood.

He froze, and his mouth dropped open in shock. "L-Lucas," he stuttered. "It's r-really youâ€¦|"

Lucas grinned weakly. "Hey Nick," he said. "Mind if I come in?"

"Of course!" Nick exclaimed. "Come in!" He held the door open for him.

Evan walked over. "Oh, hey Lucas," he said. "Back so soon?"

Nick stared at him. "What do you mean, 'back so soon?' He's been gone for weeks!"

"Wasn't he just here last night, though?"

"No! Jesus Evan, sometimes I wonder how you even function!"

Nick sighed. "Come on, do you want some food?"

Lucas nodded. "Yes please," he accepted. "I'm starving."

Nick led him into the room and directed him to a chair. "We've got some meat. Evan, go cook him some- wait, what am I thinking? I'll do it."

Nick tore off a slab of meat, went into the other room and cooked it. Once it was done, he brought it back to Lucas.

"Do you need First Aid?" he asked, looking at the dried blood that crusted over the man's clothes.

Lucas followed his gaze and shook his head, chuckling. "No," he said. "It's not mine."

"What happened to you?" Nick asked. "We've been looking for you!"

"Well you've been sucking at it," Lucas replied. He took a bit of the meat. "But I'll explain everything when everyone's together." He took another bite. "Could you take me to Sam's after this?"

Nick nodded. "Yeah, sure," he said. "We can scavenge for some new clothes on the way if you want."

Lucas grinned. "Thanks. You're a good kid, Nick."

Nick nodded. "Thanks," he said. "I have one more question for you."

"What's up?"

"Why'd you come here?"

Lucas shrugged. "You were the closest," he explained.

"Ohâ€¦ okay."

Evan walked into the room then, carrying the blackest, most burnt piece of meat Nick had ever seen. "Breakfast is done," he commented.

Nick looked at the burnt meat in disgust. "You're eating that?" he

asked.

"Yep," Evan replied. "Just how I like it; nice and cold."

After they had finished eating, the three of them, plus Alex and Jeremy, went to Sam's house. On the way, they stopped to scavenge and got Lucas a new set of clothes.

When they arrived at Sam's house, Lucas walked up to his front door and knocked. The knob turned and the door opened, but nobody was behind it.

"I swear to God I will never get used to that," Lucas muttered. He stepped into the house and loudly proclaimed, "Hey! Guess who's back?"

Sam and Ashmore were sitting on and next to the couch, eating. Next to them were Swampert, Elizabeth and Reuniclus. The five of them turned to look and stared in shock.

"Lucas!" said Sam. He stood up. "Lucas! You're alive!"

Lucas spread his arms. "Yep!" he declared. "I'm free from those bastards!"

"What happened to you?" Sam asked. "How'd you get out?"

"It's a long story," Lucas replied. "I'll tell it when everyone's here."

"Who are you?" Reuniclus asked fiercely.

Lucas frowned in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you lied to us. Either that or you're not telling us the whole truth. We saw you get captured. We couldn't help you because we were outnumbered. But we could watch. They knew you from somewhere. They've been hunting you down for a while and you didn't even tell us. I'm asking you why. What are you not telling us?"

Lucas sighed and became serious. "That's another long story."

"Cut the crap. You're not leaving until you tell us."

"Don't worry; I will! Just as soon as everyone else is here!" Lucas exclaimed. "Jeez! I'm fine, thanks for asking!"

Time passed, and the others began to congregate. Sam and Ashmore went out to spread the word and give rides to those who had none. The others were just as surprised to see Lucas. They were relieved as well, and happy to see him alive. But under that were hints of suspicion. They knew he was hiding something, and they wanted to know what.

Once everyone was present they gathered throughout the kitchen and living room. Lucas stood in the middle and began his story.

"Where to begin?" he thought out loud. "Well I haven't exactly been honest with you guys. I'll admit that."

"Yeah, no duh," said Jeremy.

"Truth is, I've had dealings with them before," said Lucas. "And by before, I mean _Before._"

"So, what?" asked Kody. "Were you one of them or something?"

Lucas shook his head. "No. God no," he said. "I was an assassin."

Everyone gaped. "Great, so we're in the middle of a post-zombie-apocalypse which also happens to be a crossover between _How to Train Your Dragon_, _PokÃ©mon_, and now _Assassin's Creed_," said Ben. "Iâ€¦ I don't know what to say anymore."

Lucas shook his head, laughing. "No," he said. "Not like that. I wasn't that kind of assassin. As far as I know, that's still fiction. No, I just killed people for money. If it helps, I only killed bad people."

"So there are no Templars then?" asked Jeremy.

"No."

"Good."

"So what happened?" Matt changed the conversation back to its original subject. "How'd you get involved with them?"

"Well, it started with a job. I was contacted by a woman who wanted me to kill someone. Only this time it was a little different," Lucas explained. "She said she had a list of targets written down somewhere. Along with the names, she had information; anything I needed. And every person on the list was connected to a secret government organization. Now there are a lot of people I'll go after, but those are my favorites, men and women at the heart of evil government conspiracies. They're nothing but a bunch of no-good pricks who only care about money and power. If you ask me, people like that deserve to die."

"Who was on the list?" asked Trent.

"To be honest, I never got to look at it. The agreement was one name at a time. But the one name I did get was enough to make me want in. He was the exact kind of guy I go for; egotistical, self-centered, power hungry. Didn't care who he hurt on his way up the corporate- or in this case federal- ladder; his name was Corvus. Alan Corvus"

Shade and Ashmore's ear flaps pricked up.

"I think I respect you a lot more now," said Sam.

"Why? You knew him?"

"No. Shade and Ashmore did."

Lucas grimaced. "I'm sorry guys," he said to the dragons. "I heard what kind of things he did in there."

"It's okay," said Matt. "They got their revenge. Shade took out Corvus's eye on Z-Day."

Shade grinned proudly.

Lucas looked shocked. "Really?" he asked. "Then I think we may have crossed paths beforeâ€¦"

Shade looked at him in confusion. _What do you mean? _He seemed to ask.

"What?" Matt asked, echoing the reptile's thoughts. "How is that possible?"

"I'll explain everything, don't worry," said Lucas. "Soâ€¦ where was I? Oh, right, the assassination."

"Okay, before you go on, I have one question," Trent interrupted.

Lucas sighed. "What?" he asked.

"Who was the woman?"

Lucas shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "My relationships with my clients were strictly anonymous. She sent me the information and money in the mail, and we used aliases. All I can tell you is that her code name was Mrs. Red, and mine was Mr. Orange.

"Anyway, I waited, I watched, and I planned. And finally, when the time was right, I struck.

"It didn't exactly go as planned."

****February 2****nd****, 2014****

****Topeka, Kansas****

Lucas buttoned up the blue uniform he was wearing, praying that it would fit. The man he had taken it from had looked to be the right size, more or less, but he couldn't be completely sure.

He finished buttoning himself and found it to be a perfect fit. _Good,_ he thought. He looked down at the body of the unconscious janitor on the floor of the closet. "Sorry dude," he whispered.

He opened the door and left the closet. A janitorial cart awaited him outside. Making sure nobody was watching, he transferred the weapons he had hidden in the closet to the cart- two silenced pistols, two katanas, and a combat knife- before draping a black sheet over them. He had more weapons, most of them guns, hidden in secret caches hidden within a half mile radius around the building.

He was in the Topeka Water Treatment Plant. His informant had reported that Corvus would be here tonight. For what reason, neither of them knew. She was risking enough finding out where he would be. But he would be paid extra if he found out why. Whatever the reason, he had a bad feeling about it.

He had been watching the building from afar for a while, until his target had arrived. After his identity had been confirmed, he waited until the scientist, along with two other scientists and five armed guards, entered the building, and then followed them in.

As he wheeled the cart through the building, he searched for the main security room. Once he found it, he kicked open the door.

A security guard sat at a desk in front of several monitors, reading a newspaper. He was middle-aged, with short, ruddy brown hair. The monitors displayed feeds from various security cameras stationed across the facility, and every few seconds he would look up at it.

As Lucas entered the room, he put down the paper. "Hey!" he exclaimed as he stood up. "You can't be here!"

Lucas approached him and the man reached for his Taser. As Lucas reached him, he lunged forward, but Lucas caught his arm.

Quickly, before the man could use his other arm, he twisted the arm he had a grip on behind the man's back, turning the man around with it. A loud crack came from his arm. With his free arm, Lucas gripped his head and slammed it into the table.

The man was knocked out instantly. Lucas let his body crumple to the floor. Searching his body, Lucas found a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. He took them, and then sat down in front of the monitors.

He took out a cigarette and lit it. As he took a puff from it, he leaned forward and scanned the monitors. "Where are you Doc?" he muttered as he searched for Corvus.

He found the scientist, along with his partners, in the main water processing room. They looked as if they were running tests.

"Gotcha," he said. He shut down the security cameras so that he wouldn't be recorded, and erased all past footage from the day. He was wearing gloves, so he didn't need to wipe anything down.

Now there's no evidence, he thought, and smiled to himself. Of course, they might recognize his handiwork. The FBI had a file on him, but they had never come close to catching him. They didn't even know who he really was.

He extinguished his cigarette and put the stub in his pocket. His DNA was on it, and he couldn't let that get into the wrong hands. Later, when he burned the suit, he would leave the stub in it.

With that in mind, he left the room. He had passed a directory on his way, so he knew where it was. He took the cart and began to wheel it in that direction.

He walked through the halls. After a couple of corners, he reached an area he hadn't been before. He could tell which room he was looking for because the guards he had seen accompanying Corvus were standing outside.

Taking a deep breath, he set off down the hall. _This is it,_ he thought. As he approached the guards, he gripped the handle of his katana, which was hidden under a sheet he had taken from the closet. He nodded in greeting and grinned as he passed the guards. "How ya doin'?" he asked.

The guard in the middle, who looked to be the leader, nodded in return but said nothing else. Lucas grinned and returned his gaze forwardâ€|

â€|until he reached the last guard.

With one single stroke, he whipped the katana from under the sheet and sliced the guard's neck open. The guard fell to the ground, gurgling as blood poured from his throat. Lucas grabbed the other katana and before the guards had a chance to act, he plunged them into the hearts of two of the other guards, including the one he thought to be the leader.

There were only two left. They raised their guns to shoot, but before they could, Lucas grabbed one of their guns, pulled it down and used it to flip the man over. He then stabbed the last one in the chin, his katana breaking through his head and emerging crimson on the other side. Finally, he knelt down over the final guard and swiftly decapitated him.

Calmly, he walked over the blood and bodies to the cart. He casually placed the bloodstained katanas back where they had been. Then, he took the pistols and entered the Processing room.

The three scientists were on the other side of the room running tests. They seemed oblivious to what was going on. He stopped for a moment to listen to them.

"Sir, the results have come back. It's clean."

"Test it again," Dr. Corvus insisted.

"But sir, we've already done three-"

"I don't care! If this pathogen gets in the water supply, there'll be unimaginable chaos! We need to make sure it's not contaminated!"

"Butâ€| Alright sir." the scientist speaking turned away from Corvus and saw Lucas

"Whatâ€| "

Lucas didn't say anything else. He raised his gun and shot him in the center of his forehead. At lightning speed, he shot the other scientist in the head as well. They collapsed to the ground, their blood pooling around them.

Corvus gaped at him in shock. Lucas pointed the gun at him and he held up his hands.

Lucas wanted desperately to shoot. But first, he wanted information. "What are you doing here?" he yelled.

Corvus said nothing.

"Tell me!" Lucas screamed, trying to intimidate him.

Corvus stared at him, his eyes saying, _Go ahead. Shoot. I dare you._

This one's a tough one, he thought. "Get on your knees!" he commanded. When Corvus didn't budge, he yelled, "Do it!"

Corvus slowly sank to his knees and put his hands behind his head. Lucas walked forward and pulled out his knife. He showed its long, serrated blade to Corvus. "See this?" he asked. "This is my friend. She really wants to meet you, but I really don't think that experience would go well for you. So, what do you say? Favor for a favor? I'll keep her away if you tell me what you were doing."

Corvus remained silent, but Lucas thought he caught a flicker of fear in his eyes. He smiled.

"You're afraid, aren't you?" he asked. He grabbed his arm, pulled up his sleeve, and rested the knife on the skin of his upper arm. "She's getting eager, he commented. "She'll start there, but she'll move to other places. I can still stop her if you let me. Come on, help me help you!"

Corvus still said nothing.

"Fine. Tell you what; I'll throw you a bone on this one. You came here to make sure the water was clean, and you said something about a pathogen. What pathogen? And why would it be in the water?"

Corvus was silent. He turned his head to face Lucas and spat in his face.

Lucas reeled back slightly and blinked in annoyance. He wiped the spit off of his face and laughed sadistically. "You're a tough sonuvabitch aren't you?"

He started to cut.

His aim was to cut so deep the knife touched bone. But before he had so much as pierced the skin, a loud moan echoed through the room.

Lucas stopped and looked towards it. One of the scientists was still alive.

"Stay here," he said to Corvus. "Or I _will_ kill you."

He stood up and went to investigate. The scientist in question was lying in a pool of his own blood. A gaping wound was present in his forehead, with a large flap of skin hanging off. As he looked, he saw that the flap was hanging off the side of his head, not the front. The bullet had not gone through his skull, but instead deflected around it.

Lucas growled in annoyance. The scientist moaned in pain again, and Lucas shot him. "Shut up!"

He checked to make sure he was really dead this time, and then turned back to Corvus. He froze.

While he had been turned away, Corvus had stood up and pulled out a gun. It was now aimed at him. Without hesitation, he pulled the trigger.

The shot echoed through the room, and an intense pain exploded through Lucas's stomach. He looked down and saw the Janitorial uniform he was wearing slowly turn red. His legs gave out and he crumpled to the floor.

The last thing he saw before he passed out was Corvus pulling out his cell phone and dialing a number. _You're done for,_ he thought. _Stupid Lucas, stupid!_

Then everything went black.

Lucas didn't remember much of the next few days. He remembered pain and darkness. At one point he was in a hospital, at another in a truck. But it all seemed hazy to him afterwards.

When he finally did wake up, it was in another hospital- a different one?- but not of the kind he had ever seen before. It looked futuristic. Everything was white and spotlessly clean. The technology he was hooked up to was more advanced than anything he had ever seen, and as he looked down at his stomach, he saw that his wound had healed completely. There wasn't even a scar. In fact, it wasn't even sore.

"Howâ€|?" he trailed off, rendered utterly speechless. He felt something clamped to his hand and saw a translucent plastic wristband. As he looked closer, he saw that there were tubes filled with liquid inside, and that one was sticking into his skin. It was like a sort of portable IV.

Suddenly, a doctor entered the room. "Good, you're awake," he said. He walked around the bed to a display on the wall. It was a large screen showing Lucas's vitals, as well as several buttons. The doctor pressed a button and a hologram appeared in the air next to it. It showed Lucas's arm, with the wristband on it. The doctor pushed on one of the outer surfaces, and Lucas felt a slight pain as something slid out of his skin.

The doctor then gripped both sides of the hologram and pried it apart. The holographic wristband slid off of the Lucas's holographic arm. As this happened, the actual wristband clicked and opened, allowing Lucas to remove it.

"Where am I?" he asked.

The doctor ignored him. Instead, he walked to the door and motioned to someone. Almost immediately, two guards came in and grabbed him. "Hey!" he protested. "What're you-"

He was cut off as they put a bag over his head and put his hands in cuffs.

They took him to a jail cell. While the rest of the facility he had

seen had been high-tech and advanced, this was pretty much medieval.

For the next few weeks, they would take him out of his cell once a day and torture him. It was always the guards; not once did he see Corvus. It was always the same questions as well. They wanted his name. Even though they already knew it, they wanted to hear it from him. They wanted to know who sent him, and why. They wanted to know if he had any other targets, and if so, who.

Lucas didn't break. No matter how hard they tried, he didn't break.

They tried other means of torture as well; verbal abuse to go with the physical abuse, for example. They tried to starve him and when that didn't work, they tried something akin to the Good Cop, Bad Cop Method. But he had trained himself beforehand to withstand all of it. He didn't break.

During the time between eating, sleeping, and being tortured, Lucas tried to figure out where he was and how to get out.

The first question was easy. He was either in somewhere where this kind of thing was legal, or he was in the lab Mrs. Red had told him about. He was guessing the latter.

The second question was harder to answer. He couldn't think of any plan to escape, so he decided that he would have to watch out for a chance and improvise when it came.

His chance would come. But not until Z-Day.

It happened while they were taking him to be tortured once more.

The bag was on his head again, and two guards were leading him to the torture chamber. Suddenly, they stopped.

"Hey!" One of the guards yelled. "What the hell! Oh my God!"

Lucas heard gunshots, and was startled, but he didn't hesitate. It was the guards shooting, and he knew they would be distracted.

He jumped into the air, flipping towards the guard to his right while wrenching himself out of the grip of the guard to the left. He landed smoothly on the guard's shoulders. The guard raised his gun and tried to shoot him, but before he could Lucas wrapped his handcuff chain around his arm, grabbed the gun, pointed it in the general direction of the other guard, and fired. He fired the whole clip in that vicinity, hoping he would get a hit. There would be no way of telling until the fight was over.

He let go of the gun and wrapped his hands around the other guard's head and twisted them sharply sideways, breaking his neck.

As his body fell, he jumped backwards, landing on the ground with ease. He pulled the bag off of his head and threw it on the ground.

Both guards lay dead on the ground, one in a pool of blood, the other on a clean floor. He smiled at his work and turned to see who the

guards had been shooting at. His smile disappeared instantly.

There was a group of scientists close by, shambling drunkenly towards him. If only they had been drunk. Instead, they looked sick. Very sick. Blood was smeared all over their faces and chests, and bits of meat hung out of their mouths. Several of them had large gashes all over their bodies, as well as what looked like bit marks, and some even had bullet holes. Yet they were somehow still coming.

What kind of shit do they do down here? Lucas thought.

Suddenly, all around him, an alarm sounded. It blared loudly, deafening him, and every ten seconds it would stop and a robotic voice would replace it. "Warning, containment breach. Evacuate immediately."

"I'm guessing that's you," Lucas said to the mob approaching him. "Shit." He began searching the pocket of the guard he had snapped the neck of for the key to his handcuffs. Rather than an actual key, it was more of a remote. When a button on it was pressed, the handcuffs would unlock. But it was fingerprint sensitive; only guards who worked in the lab could operate it.

As he searched the pockets hastily, the mob moved closer. They were almost upon him when he finally found the key. Quickly, he grabbed the guard's hand and pressed his thumb to the red button.

A small, green light illuminated on the handcuffs and there was a faint click. He dropped the key and grabbed the guard's gun, just as a hand grabbed for him.

"Jesus!" he cursed as he stood up, whirled around, and shot the sickly scientist who had done it in the chest. Blood flowed, and she stumbled backwards- but she kept moving.

He quickly walked back, putting a good twenty feet of space between them. The mob reached the dead guards. Some of them kept walking, but others bent over and started tearing chunks of flesh from the corpses.

Lucas watched in horror and disgust as they began eating the guards. "What the fuck?" he yelled. That was enough for him. He fled.

He ran through the bright, spotlessly white halls, looking for a place to hide. Every time he passed a door he tried to open it, but the doors always seemed to be locked.

Finally, he found an unlocked door and opened it.

Entering the room, he shut the door behind him, and not a moment too soon. A group of armed guards ran around the corner of the hallway. Lucas held his breath as they ran past the room he was in. He was unsure as to whether they were looking for him or for the monsters he had faced.

He let out his breath as they passed by his door without paying it any mind. As their footsteps walked away, he leaned against the door and sat on the ground, holding the gun close.

What the fuck is going on here? He thought. He could not for the

life of him think of a reasonable explanation for what he had seen. He felt like he was going to vomit.

They were like zombies.

He cast the thought aside. It wasn't possible. Instead, he focused on where he was. It looked like a closet. More specifically, a janitorial closet. He couldn't help but chuckle a little bit as the irony of it struck him.

For a while, he sat there, waiting for a safe time to make a run for it. Every time he was about to do so, however, something happened to change his mind. Guards would walk by, or he would hear some inhuman moans that he could only attribute to the undead monsters he had encountered. Other times, he would hear screaming or gunfire close by. One time, he even heard a loud, bestial roar. It didn't sound like any creature he had ever heard before, and it was close by. Soon after, a massive _something_ ran down his hallway. It was huge, and wasn't even close to being human. Moments later, some more guards followed it.

Eventually, the alarm fell silent.

He waited longer. Soon, he heard more footsteps. But they were slower this time, and voices accompanied them.

"Dr. Corvus, sir," one voice said. Lucas clenched his gun in anger. _He's here, _Lucas thought.

"With all due respect, what are we still doing down here? The pathogen's already escaped; we've failed!"

There's that pathogen again, Lucas thought. _Is that what created those _things_ I saw? And waitâ€¦ It escaped? Oh noâ€¦_

"Are you questioning my judgment?" another voice asked.

"N-no sir," the other voice said nervously. "I was just wondering."

The footsteps stopped. "There are three reasons," said Corvus. "One, to destroy what's left of the pathogen, so that it can't do any more damage. Two, to make sure none of those undead are still alive down here. And three; someone let the beasts out of their cages."

"Waitâ€¦ You meanâ€¦?"

"Yes."

That must have been that thing from earlier, Lucas remembered.

"Sir, what beasts?" another voice asked nervously.

"Ohâ€¦ you aren't in the know then?" Corvus asked.

Suddenly, Lucas felt heard huge, running footsteps coming from the hallway adjacent to theirs. Something was coming. Something big.

It's another one of those beasts, he thought.

"Looks like you're about to find out," Corvus said. "Here they come!"

The loud footsteps rounded the corner and stopped.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Corvus asked. "Kill them!"

Suddenly, there was a peculiar coughing noise. Lucas frowned, wondering what it was. In his distraction, he wasn't prepared for what happened next.

A massive explosion rocked through the hallway and closet. Lucas dropped his gun and pressed his hands against the wall in astonishment. _Holy shit!_

From outside his closet, the massive footsteps bounded past and stopped at the end of the hallway. They stopped, and he thought he heard some strange, warbling noises. Then, they bounded away.

It was then that he realized that it wasn't just one set of footsteps, but two. One bounded away, while the other turned around and began walking in his direction. He held his breath and tried to stay as quiet as possible, for fear that whatever it was would discover him.

And then a scream echoed throughout the hallway. It was human, but just barely; so intensified with agony that it barely qualified anymore. Just underneath it, he heard more footsteps- human this time- round the corner at the other end of the hallway.

There was another deafening explosion, and the beast ran towards the humans who had just appeared. The noise of screams, ripping, shooting and growling joined the cacophony of noise.

Finally, it was over. Lucas held his breath as he waited to hear who had survived.

It was the beast.

He listened as it walked away. It was much quieter this time, as it was moving slowly. Its footsteps weren't nearly as loud. The only thing that _really_ gave them away was the clicking of claws on tile.

Once the footsteps were out of his hearing, range, Lucas decided that he couldn't wait any longer. He needed to get out, and fast. He slowly eased the door open and looked out.

The hall was a mess. There were scorch marks everywhere, and thick smoke hung in the air. Bodies littered the floor, which was painted red with scarlet blood. But there was nobody left alive. He found Corvus and saw that he was lying there, unmoving, with a bloody gap where his eye had been.

Lucas stepped out and walked to the nearest body. He grabbed the guard's gun, a type he had never even seen before, and began to make

his way to the exit.

****Present Day****

"Oh my God," said Ben. "I think I'm in love."

"That is so bizarre," said Matt. "You technically met Shade before I did!"

"Yeah," Lucas replied.

"So what happened next?" asked Alex.

"Well, I got out. And for the next few months I just drifted," said Lucas. "But then I ran into these strange soldiers one day. At first, they seemed nice, but then, when I told them my name, Well, they attacked me."

"Why the hell did you tell them your name?" asked Jeremy.

Lucas shrugged. "I didn't see how it mattered anymore," he said. "But anyway, I found out that they were in league with the scientists from Before. The organization is still around, and it's trying to regroup."

"For about a month or two after that, I was running from them. The army they belonged to was constantly on my trail. I stayed with a few different groups of people, but I always ended up getting them killed because of it. Until finally, one day, I captured one of the soldiers. I interrogated him, and found out something interesting. New Hampshire was the center of their operation, and there were rumors that they had built something there that could kill all of the zombies. They were all trying to regroup here, and they were up to something. I decided that I had to stop it."

"And then I met you. By that time, I was almost sure that I had shaken their trail, and we seemed to have had common goals, so I joined you. But as it turned out, They were still on my trail."

"So you sacrificed yourself to protect us?" asked Trent.

Lucas nodded. "Yes," he said. "Well, not only that. I also wanted to get in their base. But yes; protecting you was a big part of it."

"Well, Thanks, really!" Sam said.

"What happened in there?" asked Trent. "Did you find anything out?"

"Well, It wasn't fun," said Lucas. "They tortured me pretty much every day, trying to get me to tell them who my informant was, and what other information I learned about them over the months. I never told them, though. I never do."

"I kept my eyes and ears open the whole time though. I waited for someone to slip up and give me information. And man, did they."

"One day, they came into my cell and took me away. I was used to

this; they did it pretty much every day to torture me. But this time was different. They didn't take me to a cell this time; they took me to a big armored truck. They told me they were transferring me to another location, but didn't say anything more. At least not to me.

"I overheard them talking later on. They were taking me to Boston. Not only me, but everyone else too. They're gathering in Boston for something big. Once I heard that, I knew I needed to get out of there and warn you, because there was something else as well. They were talking about rumors they had been hearing- the army doesn't keep its soldiers well informed, you see- about the Machine"

"So you escaped and came here?" asked Trent. "To tell us?"

"Yep," Lucas said. "I kicked their asses the same way I did those two guards back in the lab. Only there were more of them, and I used a semi. Then, I ran like hell away from the convoy. Ran the rest of the day and most of the night until I finally reached Nick's door so that I could tell you what I knew. They're going to Boston, and that means we have to as well."

"Well thank you very much, Lucas," said Trent. "Unfortunately, you didn't have to run quite as fast as you did. We already know. Not that we're not glad to see you, though."

Lucas frowned. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Trent told him the story. When it was over, Lucas smiled. "All the more reason to go then," he said. "I say we leave first thing tomorrow."

Trent smiled. "I agree," he said. "That was the original plan."

There were no objections. The plans were made, and they were final.

That night, the group split up and parted ways. Once Matt, Shade, Joey, Brian, Samantha and Alena all got to Matt's house, they each went to bed. All but Matt, Shade and Samantha.

"Hey, Matt, I need to talk to you," said Samantha.

"Okay," he said. When they were alone in his kitchen, he asked, "What?"

"I don't think we should trust Lucas," she began.

Matt was startled. "What? Why?" he asked.

"He lied to us," Samantha said. "He put us in unnecessary danger, and he didn't even tell us. Even worse, he's an assassin. He's killed people, Matt! A lot of people!"

"Yeah, but you heard what kind of people they were!"

"And that makes it any better?"

"Well it made me feel better!"

"He _enjoyed it_. I could see it in his face. That's not the kind of guy I think we should trust. My point is, Matt, he's _dangerous_. And now that he wants to go to Bostonâ€¦ That makes me question whether or not we should go," Samantha explained.

"What?" Matt asked. "Why? Are you saying he lied, or he's bringing us into a trap? Are you saying he's with _them _now?"

"I don't know," she said. "I doubt it. But whatever the case, he definitely has his own plans. He wants something out of this, and he'll do anything it takes to get it." She stared him in the eyes. "Do you know what Reuniclus told me earlier?"

Matt shook his head. "No," he admitted."

"She told me she couldn't read his mind. She tried to, to figure out where he had been, butâ€¦ she couldn't."

"But... Why hasn't she already told us this?" asked Matt in almost disbelief.

"Because she just found out today," Samantha explained. "She wasn't able to really get a read on him before. There was always too much going on, and then he was taken away."

Matt was silent for a minute as he tried to come up with a response. "What do you think we should do?" he finally asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't think we'll be able to convince many of the others though. Maybe Sam, but the rest I'm not sure of. Definitely not Trent. So if we can't persuade them not to go..."

"We have to make sure we go with them," Matt finished. "So that they don't get themselves killed."

"Exactly," said Samantha. "So either way, we're jumping into the fire again."

Meanwhile, Ben, Trent and Anthony had returned to Ben's house. This time, Lucas had accompanied them.

When they reached his house, Ben approached to Trent. "I need to talk to you," he said.

"Sure," he said.

"Alone."

They went down into the basement, and Ben began. "I don't know about this, Trent. I don't think Boston's a good idea."

Trent looked shocked. "What?" he asked. "Are you kidding me? You've been with me this whole time and you're just gonna back out on me? Now that we're _finally here_"

"Dude! Listen to me. This whole thing just seemsâ€¦ Odd! That note that we found on her computerâ€¦ It said that they'd been there before! And that when they were there, they had wiped her hard drive! If they knew anything about her, which they did, I bet they'd start

looking for her there. So why didn't they? It just doesn't make sense!"

"Are you saying this is, what, a trap?" asked Trent.

"I really think it might be," said Ben.

"So what, Lucas is with them, then?"

Ben shook his head. "No," he said. "I believe what he said. I think maybe they wanted him to hear that. They wanted him to escape, so that he would bring the news to us. Maybe they want us to come."

Trent shook his head. "No," he said. "No, you're wrong. The Machine is there!"

"How do you know?" Ben raised his voice. "From that note? She didn't even know for sure! And in case you didn't notice, she never came back! And that's assuming she's even real!"

Trent was silent, as he stared angrily at Ben. "I appreciate your concern," he said. "But I have to do this. For my friends and for my family."

"But we're your family now!" Ben protested. "As cheesy and cliché as that sounds, it's true! Don't do this, Trent, I beg you! You're gonna get yourself killed!"

Trent shook his head again. "I'm sorry Ben," he said. He turned away and walked upstairs, leaving Ben alone.

48. Chapter Forty-Seven: Boston

****Hey guys! Here's the last chapter before the finale! I hope you enjoy it!****

****Myself? I'm having some issues with it looking back... My personal philosophy towards violence in media has changed a bit in the years since I wrote this, and while I still love action, some of the scenes in this chapter are rather lacking in their regard for human life, even for an action scene...****

****I tried to soften it a bit, and I'm hoping that worked, but at the same time, I don't want to entirely leave it out. It's a part of the story and a part of who I was, and serves as a reminder of how far I've progressed personally.****

****But anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself here. Here's the chapter. Again, I hope you like it!****

* * *

><p>Chapter Forty-Seven:

****Boston****

****Location Unknown****

Matt woke up on a hard stone floor.

Blinking in confusion, he sat up and found himself in a strange building. It was dark, and completely deserted. He was alone.

He got onto his feet and looked around, trying to remember where he was and how he had gotten there, but it was all black. One minute he had been in his bed, and then he was here.

"Shade!" he yelled. "Ben! Sam! Trent!" He cycled through the names of his friends, praying for someone to answer. But nobody did.

As his eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw something that almost made his heart stop in fear. Someone was in the room with him. On the far side of the room, a dark, hooded figure stood staring at him. It was them again. The one who had been watching during the attack at the gas station, and the one who had been in his dream.

"You," he said. "What are you doing here? _What do you want from me?_"

The figure said nothing. Instead, they extended their arm and motioned for Matt to come.

Matt was hesitant. But he didn't feel like the figure meant to harm him. Strangely enough, he felt only urgency radiating off of them.

He took a step forwardâ€¦ And then anotherâ€¦ and anotherâ€¦

And then he was there. He looked up at the figure, who he now realized was much taller than him, and asked, "Well? What do you want?"

The figure turned around and pointed. Matt followed the path of their finger to a door he hadn't seen before. He was shocked that he hadn't; a glowing light was shining from all the cracks, making it highly noticeable.

"What theâ€¦" Matt slowly approached the door. When he got there, he gripped the handle, and was surprised to find it warm. He turned the knob and opened the door.

Immediately, his senses were assaulted by a barrage of intense stimuli. A deafening, crackling roar met his ears, and a harsh, orange light blinded him. He took several steps back and held up a hand to shield his eyes from the light.

When they had adjusted, he blinked, and moved back to the door. He saw immediately that he was in a city, and every building was covered in a fiery inferno.

The heat struck him too. It was a brutal, blistering heat hotter than anything he had ever felt.

He turned to the figure. "What is this?" he asked.

But the figure was gone.

"Whatâ€¦?" He turned back to the inferno outside and saw them in the

middle of the street. They were pointing again.

Matt looked in the direction and saw a horde of zombies. He instinctively reached for his gun, but found that it wasn't there.

In the center of the horde was large truck. The zombies were clawing and tearing at the windows, trying to get in. As Matt looked closer, he saw that someone was in the truck, someone alive.

And suddenly, somehow, he knew who it was.

"Hey!" he yelled. _"Hey!"_

Then, he was deafened by a massive, roaring sound. The world became brighter and brighter, until finally he could no longer see.

And then it was black.

****Z-Day****

"Trent. It's showtime."

Trent looked up at his friend, Josh, the drummer of their band. They were currently on tour to support their new album, and the show was about to start.

"Alright," he said. "Cool." He picked up his guitar and lined up with the others. Him, Josh, Luke, the bass guitarist, and Dave, the lead guitarist. They could hear the crowd cheering for them, and Trent's heart filled with pride; not just for himself, but for his friends as well. He couldn't believe how far they had come.

The narration that served as their introduction was almost over, and it was time for them to get moving. They walked onto the stage and appeared to the audience just as their intro ended. The crowd cheered, and Trent ran to his position at the microphone.

As they played the opening notes, Trent looked over the hysterical audience. It was like looking over an ocean of people, and he was at the center of it. The sight sent a feeling of nervousness and exhilaration through him that was unlike anything else, and never got old.

It was time for him to start. He grabbed the microphone, quickly drew it closer to his mouth, and began to sing.

The crowd went nuts as they played the song. As he built up to the chorus, they began to sing along with him. Trent continued playing chords and singing, the rest of the band kept playing, and the crowd continued to go nuts. Finally, they reached the final notes and let the crowd applaud.

They switched into gear for their next song. They started playing, and Trent readied himself to sing.

As he belted out the lyrics, he became aware of a commotion coming from behind the audience. At first, he dismissed it as a simple fight. But it got bigger. He realized people were starting to scream in fear instead of excitement, and some were running for the exit.

Security guards were running towards the commotion, guns raised.

"Hold on," he said. "Stop the music!" He waved his arms back, signaling to the others to stop playing.

The music stopped and Trent looked out into the crowd. "What's going on?" he yelled. "What happened?"

He looked back and saw that the security guards had reached the commotion, and then there were gunshots. Scarlet blood flew.

"Oh my God!" he yelled. "Everyone, get out of here!"

He turned around to see Luke and Dave running off the stage. "Guys!" he yelled. "Wait!"

"Come on, Trent!" Josh yelled.

"No!" Trent replied with determination. "Not until these people are safe!"

The gunshots continued. The arena was clearing now, and Trent could see better. The security guards were firing their weapons at a group of blood-drenched attackers. But the bullets seemed to be completely ineffective. As Trent watched, one of them grabbed a guard and started biting into her neck, drawing blood.

Trent thought he was going to be sick.

"Trent, seriously!" Josh yelled. "Come-"

His plea was cut off into a shrill scream of agony. Trent looked over to see one of the assailants onstage. This one was a tall black woman with long, black hair. She was wearing a white shirt drenched in scarlet blood. Her teeth were lodged in Josh's neck and throat.

"No!" he yelled. He ran over to them and swung his guitar into the woman's head. She stumbled backwards, and Josh fell to the ground.

"You bitch!" Trent yelled. He smacked the woman in the head again and again, as fury coursed through him. Blood sprayed, and finally, the woman fell to the ground and laid still.

He dropped the guitar, which was now splintered and broken beyond repair, and ran over to Josh. "Josh," he said.

The man looked up at him, barely alive, and opened his mouth as if to speak. But before he could, the light left his eyes.

"No!" said Trent, his eyes watering. "No, no, no, no, NO, NO, NO!" He broke down into sobs. "No!"

Then he remembered Luke and Dave. He had to make sure they were okay.

He leaned over, closed Josh's eyelids, and stood up. The arena was almost clear now, and most of the guards were dead. Some of them had

finally figured out how to kill the lunatics, but there were only a few left.

Trent turned and ran backstage, back to the preparation room. What awaited him there was a sight that he would never be able to forget.

Both Luke and Dave were dead. Their corpses lay on the ground in pools of blood. One of the lunatics was bending over Luke's body and feasting on his flesh.

"No!" he yelled. He grabbed a guitar that was hanging on the wall and smashed him in the head. He repeated this until he fell to the ground and remained still.

With the danger out of the way, Trent dropped the guitar, sunk to his knees, and sobbed.

"No!" he cried. "Why?"

He wasn't sure how much time passed. He was lost in his own world of sorrow.

Suddenly, a loud moan echoed through his mind, snapping him back into reality.

He looked around and saw Luke and Dave stand up.

****Present Day****

Trent sat up in his bed and gasped. His heart pounded in his chest, and he breathed deeply to calm himself down.

He hated that dream. It always came to him when he was least prepared for it, and always took him by surprise.

Today, he thought. _After today, there will be no more of this._

Early in the morning, everyone met at Sam's house. They ate a quick breakfast and then set out. With car and dragon, they traveled to the wall.

Only a few of them remained behind; Swampert, Lily and Elizabeth. They had wanted to come, but they were better at manning the security than any of the humans. "Besides," Sam said to Matt as they left. "I don't want them to come. I want as many of them out of harm's way as possible."

When they were all there, they exited their cars. Shade and Ashmore began to ferry the humans over the wall. The Pokémon simply floated over.

At one point, Matt looked over at Samantha, and saw her with not one, but two abnormal guns slung over her shoulder. "Hey is that the portal gun?" he asked.

"Yep." Samantha grinned.

"Why did you bring that?"

"Why not? You never know when you'll need it."

"â€|TouchÃ©," Matt replied.

Once they were all there, they searched for cars for those who couldn't fly with the dragons.

"Hold on guys," said Ben. "I need to go check something." He walked out of sight. A few moments later, they heard him scream in excitement. A car started, and he reappeared driving his old Viper that he had been forced to leave behind.

"She's alive!" he yelled in happiness. "My baby's alive!"

They found four other cars for people to ride in. After that, they drove- and flew- for a while. Despite the good feeling they had shared at Taco Bell, the nervousness that had been with them since the previous night had returned.

"Do we even have a plan?" Ben asked.

"Yeah," Trent replied. "Gain access to the city and take the Machine."

"Yeah, I know that, but how?" asked Ben. "Boston's a big city, and we don't even know where the Machine is! Plus there's the problem of getting past the army!"

"There's a convoy on its way today," Lucas suddenly interjected. "We could hijack the trucks to get into the city."

"What?" Trent asked. "And you're just telling us this _now_?"

Lucas shrugged. "Iâ€| uhâ€| kinda forgot about itâ€|"

Trent sighed. "Jesus, Lucas!" he exclaimed. "Where and when?"

"I'm pretty sure it was on the interstate," Lucas replied. "As for when, all I can say is that it was a long drive. I doubt they've passed us yet."

"Alright, looks like we're going to the interstate," said Trent. He pulled out his walkie. "Everyone pull over. Now."

Ben pulled over to the side of the road and the three of them exited the car. The other four cars joined them, and the two dragons landed.

"What's going on?" asked Andrew. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah," Trent replied. "But we need to come up with a plan."

Once everyone was gathered around him, he told them what Lucas had said. "So, I think we should go to the interstate," he concluded. "What do you guys think?"

"So now we're going to take on a whole armored convoy?" asked Jeremy. "Are you serious?"

"Yes," said Trent. "We've got the dragons! We've got firepower!"

"Yes, but we can't just take on a fully armed convoy! Firepower can only take us so far without numbers and strategy!" Jeremy explained.

"We'll have the element of surprise," Trent pointed out.

"And that will help. But we can't just run in there without- whatâ€¦!"

His words were cut off as his body gave a quick spasm. Once it was over, he stared blankly off into space.

"â€¦Jeremy?" Matt asked.

Jeremy snapped out of his daze and looked around at the others. "Sorry about that," he said. "He was starting to get on my nerves."

"Gengar!" Sam yelled. "Out!"

Gengar held up his vessel's hands. "Now wait a minute," he said. "Hear me out!"

Sam scowled. "Fine. Say what you have to say and then get out of him."

"Okay, deal," Gengar replied. "I have an idea of how to get us that convoy."

"__Oh I have a bad feeling about this," __said Reuniclus.

"Lucas, how many cars are there?" asked Gengar.

"I have no idea how many there'll be today," Lucas replied. "There were four yesterday."

"Good," said Gengar. "Not too many. I can get in there and start picking them off and drawing them out. Once they're all outside, you can take them by surprise. They won't stand a chance."

"__No," __said Reuniclus. "__No way. I won't let you do that."__

"It's not up to you," said Gengar. "It's up to the group."

"Gengar, listen to her!" Sam pleaded. "Remember what happened in Sandown?"

"Yeah, I remember," Gengar replied. "But I won't let it happen again. I'm stronger now than I was then."

"Strength doesn't matter if you don't have it," Sam pointed out.

"Then so be it," said Gengar. "Think about this. I want to live just as much as the next guy. But don't you think this is a little more important than my life?"

Trent spoke up. "He's right, Sam. This could be the only way."

"I can't believe you just said that to me," said Sam. "Gengar's like a son to me! Do you know what it feels like to lose your child?"

"How dare you say that to me!" Trent shouted. "How dare you!"

Sam fell silent, shocked at his sudden outburst.

"You don't know a fucking thing about me, do you?" Trent asked.

"I'm sorry," said Sam. "I didn't know."

"Fuck you." Trent stood up and walked back to his car. "We're doing it. Anyone who doesn't like it can stay here or go home. I don't care." He opened the passenger's side door and got in.

Sam looked to Gengar's vessel. "Gengar, please," he said.

"I'm sorry, Sam," he said. "I have to do this."

"No you don't."

"Yes, I do." And with that, he left Jeremy's body.

After a short tirade from Jeremy, they set off to reach the interstate. Once there, they found a patch of dense woods that they could hide in. There, they waited.

For hours they sat there. They became horribly bored and cold. Their backsides and legs grew numb, and from there on out it just got worse. As time passed, their hope that the convoy would actually show up gradually diminished.

"Are you sure about what you heard, Lucas?" Trent asked.

Lucas nodded. "I'm positive," he said.

"Then where is it?" asked Matt.

"Look, it's a long drive from their base!" Lucas exclaimed. "I don't know where it was, but their old base was up north. Far up north."

"Guys!" Andrew yelled. "Look! There it is!"

Everyone immediately fell silent. Gengar, who had been floating in the air over them, disappeared.

"Showtime," he thought.

The convoy appeared before them. This time there were not four, but three massive armored trucks. They looked tough; he doubted they would be able to get through that armor even with the dragons' help. Only he would be able to penetrate it.

He floated over to meet the convoy and allowed himself to pass through into the first truck. He floated into the cabin, which held

four armed soldiers, and into the back.

Jackpot.

The back contained two benches, one against each wall. On each bench sat ten soldiers. They were fully armored, with the exception of helmets, which were on the benches next to them. They were the same as those he had seen in Sandown. Each carried a gun that looked far more advanced- and deadly- than any he had ever seen.

That armor probably negates the extra danger, Gengar thought.

He picked a soldier to possess- one who was sitting in the upper right corner- and entered his head.

There was a brief moment of struggle, but as always Gengar prevailed. He seized control of the man's conscious and locked it away in the deep recesses of his mind. He now had full control of the vessel.

He slowly and subtly moved his new arms and legs, getting a feel for the body. He examined the gun. It looked like an automatic with a red dot sight. The barrel was bigger than that of any other automatic he had ever seen before. He searched his vessel's memories and found that the bullets were much larger than normal. It was called the MP-7, and it was the fastest, strongest, most powerful and accurate gun in existence. And every soldier had one.

He found that it was also unloaded. Using the memories as a guide, he retrieved a cartridge of ammo from his belt and inserted it into his gun.

"Hey!" a man across from him yelled. "What are you doing?"

Gengar finished loading the gun and cocked it.

"You give that here, Private!" the man yelled.

Gengar aimed the gun at him and pulled the trigger. The bullets ripped through his skull, sending blood splattering against the wall behind him.

The room filled with angry and startled shouts. The other soldiers scrambled to their feet and began to load their guns. Gengar turned the gun to the soldiers closest to him and shot them dead. Five dropped before the others were finally loaded.

Gengar continued shooting. As the blood flew, he could feel the truck start to slow down, just as the other soldiers finally started to shoot back.

Gengar managed to get in a few more shots- and achieve one more kill- before a bullet finally struck him. It ripped through his head and killed his vessel instantly. But Gengar's presence kept it mobile.

The soldiers in the truck with him stared in shock as the man who should be dead was still standing.

Gengar grinned mischievously, knowing that this leg of the fight was his. He could feel his strength slipping away, as the dead vessel

weighed down on him. But he would be able to finish this in time.

"Guess what?" he taunted. "You can't kill a ghost."

He lifted his gun once again and fired. One by one, the other soldiers in the truck fell in a spray of blood. Some of them tried to shoot back, but Gengar couldn't be killed.

Finally, once the last soldier was dead, Gengar exited the vessel to regain his strength. It fell to the ground just as the back door of the truck opened.

"Holy shit!" someone yelled. Gengar, invisibly hanging in the air, watched as the four soldiers from the front of the truck examined the carnage.

"What happened?" one of them asked. Nobody answered.

Some yells came from outside, and several other soldiers emerged from the other two cars. They all ran for the first truck to see what had happened. As they were running, a noise came from above. A loud, screeching, ballistic sound. The soldiers all looked up in confusion, and a grin of satisfaction spread across Gengar's lips.

Two black blurs passed across his vision, followed by two massive explosions. A large majority of the soldiers were flung into the air. Many of them were killed. Those that weren't were dazed and out of breath.

The four at the truck were spared. They instantly grabbed their guns and retreated inside.

Outside, he could hear gunshots coming from the woods. He knew he had to act now. He entered one of the soldiers and took control of their body from them. The first thing he registered was the inside of the helmet he wore; it was like nothing he had ever seen before; he could see perfectly through a plate of glass. It was electronic as well, and various words and images showed up on the screen.

Wasting no time, he gripped the soldier's combat knife and drove it into a crack between the helmet and body armor of the soldier to his left. The knife plunged into his neck, and he fell to the floor.

The other two grabbed their guns, but Gengar was much quicker. He shot them both in the head several times. Their helmets were undeniably strong, but after a few shots they caved from the force of the overpowered gun.

I like this thing, Gengar thought. _It's good._

The other soldiers were overcoming their daze and standing up. Some were about to fire into the woods. At that moment, however, the shrieking noises returned.

"Get down!" someone yelled. But they were too slow. Two explosions rocked across the road, killing almost all of the remaining soldiers.

My turn, Gengar thought. He stepped out of the truck and walked

among the carnage, looking for survivors. They were few, dazed, and wounded. He shot them all.

The others hiding in the woods emerged from their hiding places when all was clear. They walked slowly to the road to meet Gengar. Near them, Shade and Ashmore landed, carrying Matt and Sam with them.

"Gengar?" asked Trent. "Is that you?"

Gengar pointed his gun at them. "Stay back!" he yelled, shooting the dirt at their feet.

They all jumped back in astonishment and drew their guns. Shade and Ashmore both roared ferociously.

Gengar broke out into hysterical laughter. "Oh, you should have seen your faces!" he said between breaths.

The others sighed in annoyance and relief. "Asshole!" Nick yelled. "I almost shit myself!"

"Then my work is done," Gengar replied. "Now I haven't investigated these other two trucks yet, so you guys might want to wait here for a minute."

He went to look in the front of the truck he had started in, and found nothing. Then, he moved onto the second truck in the line. Nobody was in the front, so he checked the back. There was nobody there either, but there was a massive cache of supplies.

"Guys!" he called. "Come look at this!"

They ran over and looked in the back of the truck. "Oh sweet mother of God," said Nick.

The back of the truck was stockpiled with weapons, ammo, and armor.

"I think I'm in Heaven," said Alex. "Pure redneck Heaven."

As they walked into the truck to investigate the guns, Gengar turned away and walked to the last truck. Once he had searched it and found it clear, he walked back to the group.

"Alright," he said. "This convoy is ours. This vessel's services are no longer needed." He pulled off his helmet and threw it on the ground. "Shoot me," he said.

"What?" Matt asked in shock. "Why?"

"Don't worry, I'll be fine. We can't let this guy live. Just shoot me!"

"No, Gengar!" Sam yelled. "Remember what happened-"

"Yeah, yeah, I remember," said Gengar. "Just freaking shoot me already, I can handle one second!"

"What's going on?" Jeremy asked Sam.

"He wants us to kill his vessel," Sam replied. "But it drains his energy to be in a dead vessel."

"For the love of all that is good in this world, just shoot me already!" Gengar yelled.

"No!" said Matt. "No more killing!"

Everyone stopped to look at him. He looked around at the dead bodies they caused in a look that almost bordered on disgust. "No more. Not while we have other options."

"Matt," said Gengar. "We can't risk it. If he wakes up and radios into Boston--"

"Wipe his memory then!" Matt exclaimed. "You can do that, right? You can do all of that mind shit while you're in there, right?"

Gengar paused, then nodded. "Yes," he said.

"Then do that!"

Gengar hesitated, then replied, "Okay. I'll do that then."

They formed a plan before they left. All of them, including the dragons, would hide in the trucks. They would put on the armor of the soldiers, take their guns, and pose as them in order to gain entry. If their vehicles were searched, Gengar or Reuniclus would take care of the soldier doing it.

They all got into separate vehicles. Trent, Ben, Matt, Alena, Lucas and Gengar took the front of the first truck. Shade was in the back. Behind them was Alex, Jeremy, Nick and Evan, with Anthony, Kody, Andrew and Jean in the back. Finally, in the last car, Joey was driving, with Brian, Sam and Samantha. Ashmore was in the back with Reuniclus and Jack.

They drove for another hour or so before they finally reached Boston. At first glance, the city seemed normal. But as they got closer, they could see that was far from the truth.

Right as they were about to enter the city, a blockade came into sight. There were soldiers and trucks on either side of the road. Behind them, a large, makeshift barbed-wire gate stretched on as far as they could see. As they approached, they waved for them to stop.

Trent, who was driving, braked. He rolled down the window and looked out to the soldier greeting him.

"Can I see some identification please?" asked the soldier.

Trent fought back panic. He had no idea what to say. "Well— erm— Is that really necessary?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid it is."

"Come on, don't you recognize your own men when you see them? We've had a long drive; we ran out of fuel on the way down here and had to

siphon some from another truck. I think I dropped my ID while we were doing that. Isn't there a way you could overlook this just once?"

"I'm afraid not. Actually, I guess I could. I feel for you. I think the rule's pointless too; it's pretty obvious that you're one of ours. Go on in!"

"But sir, What about the General's orders?" another soldier asked.

The first soldier turned to him. "What the General doesn't know won't hurt him. Open the gates! That's an order!"

"But Sir, yes sir!"

Two soldiers stepped forward and opened it for them, allowing them to pass. As Trent drove through them, he chuckled and thought to himself, _Gotta love Gengar sometimes. That soldier's screwed._

"Sweet!" Ben exclaimed. "We did it!"

Trent grinned. But he wasn't letting himself celebrate yet. They had gotten into the city, yes.

But that had been the easy part.

49. Chapter Forty-Eight: The Shattering Pt 1

****Here it is... Finally. The beginning of the finale of Part Two of Book One. Wow, that was a lot more of a mouthful than I expected.****

****Anyway, sorry it took so long to get to this point, and thanks for keeping up with this and dealing with my older shitty writing (I'm still not amazing, but I've improved). I'm really glad you guys like this so far.****

****Also, I've edited a couple chapters back. I realize I used the wrong name for my villain again. In my drafts, his name was Dr. Martinez, but I changed his name to Dr. Corvus because I liked it more as a villain name.****

****Regardless, it's time to finish this. Word of warning: these next couple chapters get _really_ weird.****

****And now, it's time for the show.****

****Disclaimer (for the next three chapters): I don't own Pokemon or HTTYD.****

*** * ***

<p>Chapter Forty-Eight:

****The Shattering, Part One****

****Boston, Massachusetts****

"Oh my God," said Ben, who suddenly laughed hysterically. "That was great!"

"That was delayed," Matt observed.

"No it wasn't," Ben replied. "And this isn't Ben."

"Oh. What's going on, Gengar?" Trent asked. "Good job back there, by the way."

"Thanks. And I found some things in that captain's memory about Dr. Shaw."

"So she exists?" Trent asked.

"Yes. And she's alive. Here."

"If Ben's awake in there, tell him I told him so."

"Sure." Gengar fell quiet for a minute, then came back. "Anyway," he said. "I know where she is, too."

"Where?" Trent asked.

"Take a right up here."

Trent did as he was told. For the next several minutes, Gengar directed him through the streets. As they were driving, they talked as well.

"So apparently Ben and Alena have taken their relationship to the next level," Gengar, who was searching through Ben's thoughts and memories, observed. "Did you guys know that?"

Alena looked mortified. "That's private!" She protested. "You perverted ghostly fuck!"

"That's my boy!" Lucas exclaimed, only to receive a venomous from Alena.

"Yeah," Gengar agreed. "Oh, look what we have here!"

"So what's it like, being a ghost-creature?" asked Matt.

"Awesome," Gengar replied. "I really pity you humans; you will never know what it's like. Turn left here."

Trent turned the truck.

As they made their way through the city, they saw what life was now like here. Soldiers were everywhere, but not all of them were armored. Some looked as if they were on break. Some of the stores and buildings were now in use as storage or food stops. Despite this, however, one thing seemed to be missing.

"Do these people have families?" he wondered. "Where are they?"

"Maybe they're somewhere else in the city," Matt suggested.

"Maybe they're dead," Lucas added.

"Turn right," Gengar directed. "Third building on the left."

Trent turned, and they beheld Dr. Shaw's prison. It was a large but rundown hotel of about five stories. A line of guards were positioned at the entrance.

"Looks a little too fancy for a prison if you ask me," Alena commented.

"They haven't taken back any of the prisons yet," Gengar explained.

Trent pulled over on the opposite side of the street and put the truck into park. The five of them exited the truck with their guns, leaving their helmets behind. "One of us might want to stay here and guard it," said Trent. "Or at least look like they are, anyway."

"I'll do it," Lucas volunteered. He opened the door and got back into the truck.

As they walked to the second truck, they tested out the armor they had stolen from the dead soldiers. They hadn't really gotten the chance to test it out earlier. As they moved, they could tell how good it was; despite its weight and bulk, it was surprisingly agile, and moved smoothly.

"This is awesome," Matt commented.

Trent, Gengar and Alena walked to the second truck. "Can I have my boyfriend back now?" Alena asked Gengar.

"Not yet," Gengar replied. "After we talk to Shaw. I might need to say something."

"Like what?"

"I'm not sure yet."

Matt stayed at the other truck and opened the back door. The light from outside combined with the dim lights on the ceiling to illuminate Shade, who was lying curled up in the center of the floor. As Matt opened the door, Shade looked up and excitedly got to his feet.

"Hey, how's it going? You alright?"

Shade nodded.

"Alright. We're going to get Dr. Shaw. Just stay in here a little longer, and keep quiet, okay?"

Shade nodded again, and his tail thumped on the ground.

"Alright, we'll be back soon." Matt held up his fist and Shade gave him a fist bump.

Matt shut the door and turned back to the others.

The group going into the building had grown in number. Alex, Jeremy, Nick, Sam, Joey and Brian had joined them. Matt walked up to them as Gengar was talking to Sam.

"Get out of him," Sam said sternly.

"No," Gengar replied. "I want to see this. I might have some input."

"But—ugh, fine!" Sam caved. "But no more of this today, okay? Save the possession for the bad guys!"

They crossed the street, trying their best to look in formation, and approached the guards. Trent was in the lead, and he played the role of their commanding officer.

"Who goes there?" the lead guard commanded.

"My name is—" Trent searched for a name. "Captain Smith. We're here to see the prisoner."

"I haven't heard your name before," said the guard. "Are you new?"

Trent nodded. "Yes," he said. "I just got promoted."

"Well, congratulations. Which prisoner, then?" asked the guard.

"Shaw."

"For what reason?"

"We have orders straight from the General himself to bring her to him," Trent explained. "He wants to see her."

"Why can't he come himself?" asked the guard. "That's what he usually does."

Trent struggled to find an excuse. "He's busy," he said. "He has a brief window of opportunity to see her, but doesn't have time to come here. We're to bring her to him."

The guard considered. "Fine," he said. He stepped aside. "Top floor, room 415. Key's under the loose floorboard in front of the door. Be quick."

Trent nodded, and walked by. The others followed, and they entered the building. They emerged into an old, rundown lobby. A broken chandelier hung from the ceiling two stories up. It was small, and contained a couple couches and a reception desk. Three exits led away from the room; two hallways and one staircase. In addition, there were two elevators.

More guards were scattered across the room. None of them said a word to them as they walked by past the reception desk and to the first staircase.

They climbed the stairs in silence until they reached the top floor. Trent stepped out into the hallway and led the way. The first door they came across read _410_. "We're close," he observed.

"No, really?" asked Gengar. "Your math must be wrong. 415 is nowhere near 410. Jeez."

They followed the hallway until they reached 415. Trent groped the floorboards until he found a loose one. He opened it to reveal an old-fashioned metal key, which he took. He unlocked the door and slowly opened it.

When it was fully opened it revealed a small, poorly-kept hotel room. It was nothing but a bed with a nightstand next to it and a table on the other side. To his left was a closed door which he presumed led to a bathroom. Dirt and dust were everywhere, and there were blood stains on the walls.

"Hello?" he called. "Dr. Shaw? We're here to talk."

He took another step inside.

At that moment, the door to his left burst open, and with a scream of rage, a woman came flying out with a large, razor-sharp splinter of wood in her hand. She swung it at Trent's head, aiming to kill.

Trent just barely held up his hand in time, saving his life. "Wait!" he yelled as she attempted to drive the point into his face. "No, stop! We're not here to hurt you! We just want to talk!"

Behind her, Alex stepped forward and grabbed her. He yanked her off of Trent, and she struggled to get out of his grip.

"That's what you always say," she spat. She was a tall, black woman, with long, shoulder-length black hair and green eyes. She was wearing a white, long-sleeved shirt that had become increasingly filthy during her time in captivity, and a pair of blue jeans.

"No, really!" Trent protested. "We're here to help! We want to help you get out of here!"

The woman stopped, and stared at him. "Is this a trick?" she asked.

"No," Trent replied. "Are you Dr. Shaw?"

"Yes," she replied. "You should know that."

"Well, we don't," said Jeremy. "We're not actually part of Phoenix."

She looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"We snuck into the city to find you," Trent explained. "We're enemies of this army as well. We have common interests."

Dr. Shaw stared at him. Finally, she said, "If I agree to talk, will you call your dog off?"

"Hey!" Alex protested. "That's rude!"

Trent ignored him. "Yes," he said.

"Fine then." She dropped the piece of wood.

Alex let her go and quickly stepped back. Dr. Shaw braced herself, as if expecting them to attack. When they didn't, she relaxed.

"Come in," she said. "Let's talk."

She walked further into the room, and the group followed her, shutting the door behind them. As she stopped on the other side of the bed, violent vibrations suddenly began running through the building, shaking its very foundations. Each of them pressed their hands against the wall, the bed, or the table to keep their balance. Dust fell from the ceiling, and a lamp on the nightstand slid off the edge and shattered. Finally, after a few more seconds, it was over.

Dr. Shaw stood up straight, keeping her cool and acting like it was a perfectly normal event. The others stood up as well, but more cautiously.

"What the hell!" Joey yelled. "What was that?"

"An earth tremor," Dr. Shaw replied.

"No shit!" said Jeremy. "Why?"

Dr. Shaw shrugged. "I don't know. They've been occurring periodically for weeks now. Nobody seems to know why; at least, not that they've told me."

"That's strange!" said Matt.

"You're telling me," said Dr. Shaw. "So what brings you all the way in here?" She leaned forward. "I heard that you wanted to get me out of here."

"We do," Trent confirmed. "But in return we need your help."

"Anything I can do," Dr. Shaw said, grinning slightly.

"We came here because we're looking for the Machine," said Trent. "We heard about you, and found your secret lab. We read the note you left, and-"

"Wait, what?" Dr. Shaw asked sternly. "What note?"

Trent frowned. "The one you left on your computer."

Dr. Shaw's confused face turned to one of concern. "Oh," she said. "Oh no!"

"What?" Sam asked in concern. "What's wrong?"

She looked down at the floor, and then stood up straight again. "I didn't leave that note. It was a trap."

"What?" asked Brian in shock.

"What's that?" Gengar asked. He appeared to be listening for a moment, and then he said, "Trent, Ben would like to say, 'I told you so.'"

Dr. Shaw looked at him, and then at Trent questioningly. Trent shrugged, and waved his hand dismissively. "Don't mind him." Ignoring Gengar's glare, he continued. "What do you mean it was a trap?"

"They have ways of luring their enemies here," she said. "This city is many things for them, and one of them is a trap. Fortunately, the fact that you got this far means that they probably don't know you're here yet, and that gives us time.

"You said you were here for the Machine," she continued. "I have some bad news for you. It's not here. It never was."

Groans passed among the group, and an endless void of disappointment opened in Trent's chest. "See, I told you this was insane!" said Brian. "But you didn't listen! You never listen!"

"I know where it is though."

The group immediately fell silent. "Where is it?" asked Trent. "And how do you know?"

"I'll tell you everything later," she said. "We don't have time to talk about all that now. If we take too long, the guards downstairs will get suspicious." She paused, and looked at them questioningly. "Did you come through the front door? Or did you sneak in?"

"We told the guards we were taking you to the General," Trent explained.

Dr. Shaw sighed in relief. "Good," she said. "That makes things easier. But it presses us for time as well. We need an escape plan, and quickly."

"How are we going to do that?" asked Matt.

"I don't knowâ€¦" Dr. Shaw trailed off and turned around, looking out the window over the city.

"I have an idea," said Gengar. He pushed his way forward and stood in front of the bed. "I'm good at this sort of thing."

Dr. Shaw turned around. "I'm not sure I should be taking advice from an insane person."

"Oh I'm perfectly sane," Gengar retorted. "We left the insane one at the car. But anyway, if you want out, this idea might be your best bet."

She sighed. "Okayâ€¦ what is it?"

"From what I saw on the way here, we're not gonna get out of this city easily," said Gengar. "Not without a distraction. Now, I'm

asking you, what would cause them to panic the most? What would cause the biggest distraction? Preferably involving something being destroyed."

Dr. Shaw thought for a moment. "The buildings in use all have electricity," she explained. "There's a large building covered in solar panels that provides it for them. If we destroy that building, it would create a big enough panic for us to slip out. The only problem is that it's crawling with guards."

"So we'd need another distractionâ€|" said Gengar. "How much of this city does the army control?"

"Just the north, so far," Dr. Shaw replied. "From what I understand they've only recently begun expansion."

"Are they going to want the rest of the city?" asked Gengar.

"Yes. Definitely."

"Soâ€| here's my idea. What if we were toâ€| I don't knowâ€| start a fire somewhere outside their territory? They definitely wouldn't want to risk the rest of the city burning down, would they?"

"Hmmâ€|" Dr. Shaw nodded. "That would work."

"We should probably start two, just to be safe," said Gengar. "And make them big enough to get their attention quickly. Any ideas?"

"How about the airport?" Matt suggested. "That would make a huge bang."

"That would be our best bet," Dr. Shaw agreed. "They'll want the airport later on, and destroying it would definitely get their attention. The other fire should be one of the skyscrapers. I recommend the John Hancock Tower. It's the tallest in the city. If _that _doesn't get their attention, I don't know what will."

"That sounds good," said Gengar. "The only question is; who's going where?"

"I'll go with whoever's going to the electrical building," Dr. Shaw volunteered. "I also recommend that you send more people there than the other two places."

"Our truck will take that," Alex volunteered. "You can ride in the back."

"We'll take the John Hancock Tower," Trent volunteered.

"Guess that leaves us with the airport," said Joey.

"Alright, glad that's settled," said Dr. Shaw. "Now, you'll need directions to the closest exit. Luckily, it's not far. As I recall, you just need to take a left from here, your third right, and then your second left. That street leads to the exit. Got it?" Brian and Trent, who were both driving, nodded. "Good," she said. "Now let's go."

As they were leaving, Dr. Shaw spoke up. "Hey," she said to Trent. "What's your name?"

Trent stopped and turned to her. "Trent," he said.

"Trent," Dr. Shaw repeated. She walked up to him, and said quietly, "How do I know I can trust you?"

"Why would I lie to you?" Trent asked back.

"I don't know. But this would be exactly like them to do something like this."

"You said it yourself. You're a trap," said Trent. "If I were Phoenix, why would I ruin that?"

Dr. Shaw pondered his words, and then nodded. She then turned and walked over to the bed and stuck her hand under the mattress. When she brought it back out, she was holding a flash drive. She handed it to him.

"Take this, Trent," she said.

"How the hellâ€|?"

"I found a laptop in the nightstand. They confiscated it, but not before I was able to make this. Take it, in case I don't make it out."

"You'll make it out," he said. "Don't worry."

"I hope so. But, even still, you need to take it."

Trent took the flash drive and put it in his pocket. Then, they left. When they were in the hallway, Jeremy took out a pair of handcuffs.

"I found these in the back of our truck," he explained. "We should make this look realistic."

Dr. Shaw sighed. "You're right," she said reluctantly. She held out her hands to him, and he clipped the handcuffs on. Then, Alex and Jeremy stepped to either side of her and grabbed her arms.

"Make it look convincing," said Alex. Dr. Shaw nodded.

They marched down the stairs, Trent in the lead and Dr. Shaw in the middle. She feigned struggle, but not so much as to hurt Alex and Jeremy, or herself. When they reached the ground floor, Matt held his breath, as he prayed they wouldn't be caught.

They crossed the lobby without problem. As they were stepping outside, the guard they had talked to before asked, "She give you any trouble?"

Trent shook his head. "She struggled a bit, and it took a while to put the cuffs on, but we got her."

"Good," said the guard. "See you soon."

They walked over to the trucks, with Dr. Shaw struggling and yelling. Jeremy and Alex brought her to the back of their truck and opened the door. "Get in there!" Alex yelled. He shoved her in and slammed the door shut, pretending to lock it behind her.

They all took their places inside the truck. Sam was about to do the same, when a thought popped into his head.

He went to the back of his truck and opened it. "Jack," he called.

The Chandelure appeared in front of him, curiosity radiating off of her. "I need you to go with the second truck," he said. "They'll explain the plan to you there. But they need someone who can produce fire. We have Ashmore already, and Matt, Trent, Lucas, Ben and Alena have Shade, but the others have no one. Can you do that?"

Jack nodded, and disappeared.

"Thanks," said Sam. He looked at Reuniclus and Ashmore, and said, "You two okay?"

Ashmore nodded. _"Yeah,"_ said Reuniclus. _"You?"_

"Yep," said Sam. "So far."

_ "__Good."_

Sam shut the door and went to the front. Once everyone was in, the trucks started and drove away.

Once they had pulled out of sight of the prison, the trucks split up. Trent and Brian drove to where they had been directed in order to leave the occupied portion of the city. Alex drove them beyond that. They found an alley where there were no guards and pulled into a park.

Alex and Jeremy exited the car and walked around to the back. They opened it, and helped Dr. Shaw, who had been explaining the plan to the others, out.

"Sorry, I don't think we can take those cuffs off," said Alex. "The key's fingerprint sensitive, and I don't know if we have anything strong enough."

Suddenly, Jack appeared behind him. Dr. Shaw stifled a scream, as she jumped back. "What the hell is that?" she demanded to know.

"Oh, her?" said Alex, turning around to see Jack. "I didn't know you were with us! That'll make things easier."

"You knowâ€| _herâ€|_" asked Dr. Shaw.

"Yeah," Jeremy replied. "She was created in one of your labs."

"Ohâ€|" said Dr. Shaw. "Okay thenâ€| That'sâ€| Wait, what's she doing?"

Jack had floated over to her, and was touching her flames to the

handcuffs. Dr. Shaw backed up nervously, but Jack followed, and before long, her handcuffs had melted through.

Dr. Shaw spread her arms apart in wonder. "Thanksâ€¦" she said.

Jack sent her a feeling of happiness, and then disappeared.

"What the hellâ€¦"

"Don't ask. Just come with us."

They brought her to the front with them. Quickly checking to make sure that nobody had seen them, they got in, started the car, and pulled out of the alley.

Dr. Shaw directed them to the power building. On the way, she explained their mission further.

"They keep a storage room filled with propane and generators," she said. "You know, in case of emergencies. That would be the perfect place to start. Do you have any explosives?"

"There's some C4 in the back," said Alex.

"Perfect. We'll find somewhere nearby where we can hide and watch. Once the other two teams have completed their tasks, and the soldiers are distracted, we can move in."

"Any ideas as to where?" asked Nick.

"I'm working on it."

Once they finally reached the power center, they drove around the area, Dr. Shaw hiding her face so nobody recognized her. They eventually found another alley a few blocks away that was pretty abandoned. There, they waited.

They stayed in the truck for a while, waiting to hear explosions. Minutes passed, and as the time ticked away, they began to grow more impatient.

"What's taking them so long?" asked Nick.

"Seriously?" asked Dr. Shaw. "They're trying to blow up a building. Do you realize how hard that is?"

"Yeah, butâ€¦ Oh whatever."

Suddenly, as they were waiting, there was a knock on their door.

"Shit!" Alex whispered. "Get down!" he ordered Dr. Shaw. She knelt over and hid herself from the window, while Alex opened the door.

There was a soldier standing outside. Behind him were several more, far outnumbering them. "Sir, may I ask what you're doing here?" asked the soldier.

"Uhâ€¦ Wellâ€¦" Alex tried to think of an excuse. "We're on break,"

he said.

"Then why do you have one of our trucks with you?"

"Uhâ€¦"

"I'm gonna have to ask you to step out of the vehicle."

"Come onâ€¦"

The soldier drew his gun. "Get out. Now."

Alex held up his hands and got out of the truck. "Okay, okay," he said. "Sheesh. It's no big deal."

"Search it," the soldier commanded.

"Oh come on, there's really no needâ€¦"

A soldier stepped forward and opened the other door. He immediately saw Dr. Shaw hiding on the ground.

"Heyâ€¦ wait a minute," he said. "You'reâ€¦ you're one of the prisoners!" He immediately drew his gun and aimed at those inside. "Get out, now!"

The soldier holding Alex at gunpoint yelled, "On your knees! Now!" Alex dropped to his knees, dismay filling him. The others in the car slowly got out and fell to their knees as well.

"Everyone else, search the back," the leader ordered. He kept his gun firmly pointed at Alex.

The other soldiers went into the back and opened the door. They immediately drew their guns and herded the others out onto the road, lining them up on their knees.

"Shit," said Alex.

Meanwhile, Brian and his truckload had just reached the airport.

As they pulled into the airport, Brian steered the truck around the building to the runway. Once there, he switched into park and killed the engine.

They scanned the runway. Deserted planes lay scattered around like old, abandoned toys. But they all seemed intact. As Brian looked at them, a thought occurred to him: these planes might still be able to fly.

"We could just leave," he said to the others. "We could take one of these planes and fly to an island. We could clear it out and then never have to deal with the zombies or the army ever again. We could do it."

They sat there in silence, contemplating what he had said. "No," Samantha finally said. "We can't just leave everyone else."

Brian sighed. "I know," he said. "So how are we going to do this?"

"We could cut all the gas lines," Joey suggested. "Make a huge pool and then light it up."

"That could work," said Sam. "It would definitely get their attention. Let's do it."

They got out of the car and put on their helmets. Brian immediately gasped as the complicated technical interface appeared on his heads-up display. _Too bad I can't do anything with it,_ he thought.

Sam walked around to the back of the truck and let Ashmore and Reuniclus out. The Night Fury bounded out of the tight confinement and stretched his legs on the ground. Sam explained the plan to them, and they were off.

"Soâ€¦" Joey said as they walked. "Anyone have any idea where the fuel for a plane would be?"

_"__Let me check," _said Reuniclus. She closed her eyes and sent out a wave of psychic energy, mentally scoping out the nearest plane. _"Found it," _she said. She floated up to the spot and tapped it. _"Shoot there."_

They aimed at the plane and shot five bullets into it. Fuel began pouring out of the holes and pooling on the ground. "Reuniclus," said Sam. "Could you make this all pool in the center of the runway?"

_"__Sure,"_ she said. _"I can do that."_

As soon as she started, however, they heard a voice.

"Hey! What are you doing?"

The voice was followed by the sound of armored footsteps. The hair on the back of Sam's neck stood up. He knew that voice.

Maverick.

He turned around and held up his hands. Maverick, fully armored, stood in front of a large group of soldiers. He was staring at Ashmore and Reuniclus in shock.

"You," he said. "It's you."

Sam sighed. "You've got me," he said.

"The Man in Black!" Maverick exclaimed. "Get on your knees! All of you!"

The humans all did as they were told. Ashmore growled, but he sank to his belly.

"I can't believe it," said Maverick. He stepped forward, chuckling to himself. "I've finally got you."

The final group reached the John Hancock building without any trouble. As they pulled up in front of the massive structure, Trent

put the truck into park and they exited the car. Gengar, who had left Ben's body, disappeared behind them.

"Now what?" asked Ben.

"Let's go inside," Lucas suggested. "Maybe we could find a map of the foundation, and see where the best place to hit it would be."

"Any better ideas?" asked Trent. No one spoke. "Alright. Let's go."

They put on their helmets and took the time to admire the technology put into it. Matt went around back to let Shade out of the truck, and then they entered the building.

As soon as they did, they froze.

The lobby was large, and filled with reception desks and various furniture. The walls were covered in glass windows on the side they had entered, much like the rest of the building. The other walls were covered in various paintings, posters, pictures and memos, save the occasional breach into a hallway, elevator or stairwell. And in the middle, a group of soldiers stood waiting for them, their guns pointed at them immediately.

"Fuck," said Ben.

"Well, well, well," said the soldier in charge. He walked forward to them. "It's nice to see you again, Shepard. As I recall, we hadâ€¦ unfinished business."

"General," Lucas greeted.

"God _damn it!_" Trent yelled. "We were _so close!_"

"Oh, don't be too hard on yourself," said the General. "We've been expecting you guys to show up."

"Whatâ€¦?" asked Trent. "How?"

The General laughed. "Isn't it obvious?" He asked. "You have a traitor in your midst!"

A chill ran up Trent's spine. _Noâ€¦ no, it can't be! _He thought. "Who?" he demanded.

Suddenly, a cold, metal object pressed against the back of his head. And he realized just who it was.

"Surprised?" asked Lucas, as he cocked the gun.

50. Chapter Forty-Nine: Memories of Betrayal

****Chapter Forty-Nine:****

****Memories of Betrayal****

****December 15****th****, 2014****

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

"Are you ready?"

Lucas looked up at the face of General Maynard, who was talking to him. His hair was dark brown, and he had a short mustache and beard. His piercing blue eyes revealed a deep intensity that only a hardened veteran could have. A long scar split his right eyebrow in half.

"Yes," said Lucas.

"Let's go over your mission one more time," said Maynard.

"Do we have to?"

"Yes. We've pinned down the location of one of the escaped Night Furies. We're going to have to terminate it at some point, but there's something else too. The Fury's traveling with a group of humans. Anyone significant enough to get one of those beasts' attention is someone deserving of our attention. So, what do I want you to do?"

Lucas reached into his pocket and pulled out a cigarette. He then pulled out a lighter and lit it, before proceeding to take a deep puff. "You want me to go in there," he explained. "And infiltrate their group. Figure out why this beastie is hangin' with them. And see if they're a threat. Or, better yet, if they'd be willing to join our cause. I'm to report back in a few days with information."

The General nodded and smiled. "Good," he said. He stood up and opened the door leading out of the room. They were in the back of an armored truck, with guards positioned all around it. As Lucas stepped out of the back, he saw the gun he would be using.

"Oh General, did I ever tell you how much I love you?" Lucas asked as he beheld the massive minigun. Of course, he couldn't use their hi-tech weaponry, for fear of arousing suspicion. But this was the next best thing.

The General stepped outside and smiled. "Nope," he said. "But I know it. It's the least I can do for one of my best soldiers. Now, take this," he handed Lucas a map of Harristown. "They're holding up at the high school. I've circled its location on the map, as well as our current one. Good luck."

"Oh, don't worry about me," said Lucas. "I'll be fine. Say, what are you guys gonna be doing in the meantime?"

Maynard smirked. "There's a town in the area that's been taken over by a bunch of thugs. We're gonna check them out and see if they're any good for the army."

Lucas chuckled. "Good luck with that," he said. "We could always use more soldiers." He waved goodbye and walked away.

"Oh, and Lucas!" Maynard called. "Watch out for the dragon! It's possibly more intelligent than the humans are!"

Lucas smiled, and stopped walking. "That won't be a problem. When

we're done with it, it'll be mindless and rotting six feet below."

****December 22****nd****, 2014****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Lucas walked through the dark woods to the meeting place on the border. He had snuck out of Ben's house while everyone was asleep, and was now on his way to meet General Maynard.

Once he reached the meeting place, Maynard appeared to him on the other side of the border.

"Don't come any closer," said Lucas once Maynard was about ten feet from the motion sensor. "You'll set off their security system. They have this whole place set up with motion detectors."

Maynard stopped, shocked. "Wow," he said. "I'm impressed. So, I take it you've gotten some information?"

Lucas laughed. "That's putting it lightly," he said. "We hit the jackpot with these guys."

"So, you're ready to be picked up, then?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Lucas. "But we'll have to put on a show this time. You guys won't be able to get in without alerting them, and they'll probably see the whole thing. As much as it pains me, we're gonna have to make it look like I'm actually being captured by you."

Maynard grimaced. "We might have to beat you then," he said. "Oh well. It's all for the greater good, right?"

Lucas grinned sheepishly and looked down. "Yeah," he said.

Maynard tossed him a map of Lyndrich. "I highlighted the road we're using to get in," he said. "Be there at noon. Don't be late."

****January 19****th****, 2015****

****Bartlett, New Hampshire****

After Lucas had been "captured" by the army, he had told them everything. From the dragons to Trent's plans to the PokÃ©mon. When he had said all there was to be said, phase two of their plan was set in motion.

First, adjustments were made. The remaining scientists gathered data from past experiments, archives salvaged from Aperture laboratories, and Lucas's accounts, and eventually, various new technologies were formed. A new metal was created for armor and bullets that would counterattacked the ghostly powers of Gengar and Jack, and chips were implanted into the higher officers' heads to prevent Reuniclus from reading their mind. The latter technology was incredibly hard to make, and therefore only the highest priority officials were given it. Because of his exploits, Lucas was one of those.

After all of this, they had decided to try and recruit these humans. They were perfect for the army; strong, smart and determined, for the most part. A little re-education, and they would be all set. But there was one problem they had to take care of first: the non-humans.

Earlier that day, the dragons had been sighted flying to the mountains. Scouts had been sent out, and it was confirmed to be the same group Lucas had infiltrated. A blizzard was on its way, and the time was perfect to strike. Lucas himself had volunteered for the mission; he knew them the best, and he knew what their weaknesses were.

He dressed himself from head to toe, both to keep warm and to remain anonymous. Then, he took his MP7, got in a car, and set out to work.

He drove all the way to Bear Peak, where the Night Furies had last been seen. The blizzard was starting to pick up as he switched off the engine and got out of the car. He entered the woods and began to look for a trail.

He walked for a while, looking for a trail of any kind. He knew it was possible that he wouldn't find them at all. But he had to at least try

Finally, as the blizzard reached its most ferocious point, he thought he heard a roar in the distance nearby. Following it, he eventually emerged from the woods and saw a dragon lying in the snow.

He slowly approached the dragon, waiting for him to make a move. But he did nothing. He just laid there while Lucas got closer. When he was only a few feet away, he saw that the dragon was sleeping.

What is he doingâ€|?

Suddenly, Ashmore stirred. He sniffed at something beneath his wings, and moved in an urgent manner.

Lucas decided it was then or never. He ran the rest of the way and held his gun to Ashmore's head. Satisfaction spread through him as the dragon stiffened, but realized it was helpless.

Sorry about this, big guy, said Lucas. _But you have no place in this world._

As he was about to pull the trigger, however, a wave of pure hatred flooded through him. But it wasn't his. In fact, it seemed_ directed_ at him.

He turned to his left, and saw Jack, the Chandelure, materialize out of thin air. _Shit_, he thought.

A huge burst of fire shot off of her body and in his direction. He stumbled back, out of its reach, just barely getting away.

I can't let her see me. I can't!

There was only one option. He ran.

He returned halfheartedly to base. Maynard had been disappointed, but not angry with him.

"It's not a total failure," he said. "Our plan can go on regardless. In fact, we could even twist this to our advantage."

Either way, however, it was clear what the group was there for. Trent had been looking for the Machine. And that meant there was only one person they could be looking for; Dr. Shaw.

They were still spreading rumors about her to get their enemies attention. But the truth was, they had captured her weeks ago.

"We need you to go back," Maynard said that night.

"What?" asked Lucas.

"You need to go back and lure them into Boston. Put the idea in their heads.

Then we'll have them right where we want them."

The plans were made, and the next morning, Lucas was driven to Lyndrich. They hid the car just outside the border, and Maynard and Lucas stepped out.

"I think you know what I have to do," said Maynard.

"Yeah, I know. You gotta make it look realistic." Lucas spread his arms, exposing his body. "Go on, let's get this over with."

General Maynard pulled back his fist and smashed it into Lucas's body repeatedly. Once Lucas looked beat up enough, he went into the trunk of the car and produced a shirt wet with blood.

"Put this on," he said.

Lucas did as he was told, and was ready. Maynard stuck his hand into his pocket and pulled out a small, circular metal device. "Once they get into the city, plant this bug somewhere. We'll find a way to sabotage their plans."

Lucas nodded. "Will do," he said. He put the bug into his pocket.

"Don't fail me again," said Maynard, just as he was about to leave. "Good luck."

****January 21****st****, 2015****

Lucas watched as Trent, Ben (or Gengar in this case), Matt and Alena left with the others. The coast was clear for him.

He had sacrificed a lot to get them into the city. He would have preferred to have spared the lives of those in the trucks. However, General Maynard had assured him it would be okay. As long as they attacked this particular convoy, it would be acceptable. He had made sure to send only soldiers he wanted punished.

He decided not to dwell on it too much. What was done was done, and

there was a task at hand.

Back in the present, he searched for a good hiding spot for the bug. He found a small corner of the ceiling that was obscured with shadow. He attached it there.

"Hey General," he said. "Hope you can hear me. This is our last chance, after all. Here's your bug. Have fun."

51. Chapter Fifty: The Shattering Pt 2

****Alright guys... here's the final chapter. This is the longest one yet I believe, so buckle up, and get ready for the ride...****

* * *

<p>Chapter Fifty:

****The Shattering, Part Two****

****Boston, Massachusetts****

A feeling of betrayal, sharp as a knife, tore through Matt's insides. They had lived with Lucas- trusted him! Matt couldn't comprehend how he could do something like this. He looked over at Shade, who was growling fiercely at Lucas.

"Shut up, you overgrown lizard," said Lucas. He put down the gun and stepped in front of the group, next to the General. "Watch out, guys. The ghost is here." Some of the soldiers turned around and scanned the room nervously.

"So you're with them now?" Ben asked venomously. "You just sold us out?"

"No," Lucas replied. "I've always been with the army. I was a spy this entire time, dumbass."

No

"So that story you fed us, about you being an assassin, was all lies?" asked Ben.

Lucas shrugged. "Well yes and no. I was an assassin. But I worked for them. And that story never happened."

"Why?" Matt asked. "Why would you do this to us?"

"You sound accusing," said Lucas in confusion.

"You're right! We do sound accusing! Because you're a good-for-nothing bastard!"

"You guys don't understand. We're just trying to help you!"

"Sure you are," said Alena. "They always say that."

"Well we mean it," said the General. He stepped forward, in front of Lucas. "This whole ordeal has been a test. We've been putting you

through trials, and watching every step of the way. And my friendsâ€¦
You've passed with flying colors."

"What about the convoy?" Matt asked. "Was killing them part of your test?"

"It was if it needed to be," the General replied. "Those men deserved to die. They were criminals, all of them. I made sure of it."

"What about Dr. Shaw?" asked Trent. "Is she on your side too?"

The General shook his head and waved a hand in dismissal. "No," he said. "No, she's still our prisoner. We just use her work to our advantage. She just doesn't understand what we're trying to accomplish."

"And what's that?" Ben asked skeptically.

"We're trying to rebuild!" The General exclaimed exuberantly. "We're trying to create a new world from the ashes of the old one! That's why the Pheonix Initiative is still around! That's what we have been working for these past months! That is why we want you to join us!"

They were speechless; at a complete loss for words. None of them had expected this.

"What?" asked Ben.

"You've passed the test. You made it all the way here. You've proven to be strong and smart, and we want you in the Initiative army. Or, if you'd prefer, you could join the science, or even the political division. You'd do well with us. You could be a part of the reformation of society. You could rise higher than you ever dreamed! And you," he pointed at Matt. "Can protect your dragon."

Matt wasn't buying it. "I heard about the sick shit you guys did to them before all this," he said. "How can you say this would be good for them?" He protectively inched closer to Shade.

"That was Corvus's doing," the General explained solemnly. "I can't defend some of the things that old bastard did, and I won't try. But our views have shifted. The dragons have earned their right to life, but there are some who don't see it that way. They've been trying to kill your friend, and the only reason they haven't already was because we interfered. But we can't help completely unless you join us.

Matt remembered the man who had tried to kill Ashmore on Bear Peak. It was tempting; protection for Shade. He'd do anything to keep the dragon safe.

But he wasn't sold. He looked at Shade, who met his gaze. The Night Fury's eyes were filled with distrust. And that was enough for him.

As if he was reading their minds, Trent spoke up. "I don't buy it," he said. "It may be the skeptic in me, but I don't believe a single ounce of the shit that's spewing from your mouth. I've seen countless so-called leaders say the same thing, only to have been lying. This

is no different. Same shit, different day."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," said the General. "How about the rest of you? Surely there must be someone with sense here."

"No," said Matt. "I'm with Trent."

"So am I," said Ben.

"I'll stick with the people I trust, thank you very much," said Alena.

Shade snorted in agreement.

"Very well," said the General. "That's a shame. You had such potential."

From behind, Matt caught a glimpse of something that made him grin. It was Gengar, briefly revealing himself to them. He was next to the reception desk.

"Men, take their weapons," said the General. "Maybe some time in prison will help them reconsider."

"How the hell is this supposed to win us over?" asked Ben. "Seriously!"

Matt smiled. "I don't think that's gonna happen."

Lucas frowned, and then his face lit up in realization. "Shit!" he cursed. "The ghost!"

And suddenly, right next to him, a computer monitor slammed into a soldier at blinding speeds, sending him flying across the room.

"Well isn't this a pleasant surprise?" Maverick asked.

"Not really," said Joey, as a gun pointed at the back of his head.

"Hey!" Maverick yelled. "Did I say you could talk?"

"Well you asked a questionâ€¦"

"Shut up!"

Maverick paced over to Sam. "You'll have to excuse my behavior. I was supposed to be nice. But considering our history, I don't think that's gonna happen."

He held his gun up to Sam. "Take your helmet off," he demanded. "Let's see the man behind the mask."

Sam hesitantly unclipped his helmet and lifted it from his head.

Maverick frowned. "Well, I've gotta say I'm disappointed. I was expectingâ€¦ more." He cocked his gun. "Oh well. You'll be out of my hair soon. I was ordered to bring you in alive, but I'm sure we can

get away with a little accident." He laughed. "Say hello to Carlton for me, will you?"

_"__No!"_

Reuniclus's voice screamed in their heads, full of fury. But Maverick just laughed. He turned around and saw Reuniclus floating about twenty feet away from them.

_"__Iâ€¦ I can't control him!"_ Reuniclus said, panic lacing the edge of her words.

Sam stared in shock and helplessness as Maverick held his gun up to her. "Move and I'll shoot!" he yelled. Reuniclus ignored him and started to float away. He pulled the trigger.

A cry of pain filled their minds, and blood splattered. Her body fell through the air and hit the ground.

"No!" Sam yelled, tears forming at the edge of his vision.

Maverick directed two soldiers to guard her. As he stepped back over to Sam, he breathed a sigh of relief to see that the bullet had only hit her arm. Her membrane was already starting to reform around it. She was alive.

"Lucas told us all about her," Maverick announced. "We've made modifications to our equipment."

The words cut into Sam like a knife. "Lâ€¦ Lucas?" he asked.

"Kid, you can't trust anyone in this world," said Maverick. "It's about time you learned that."

"I knew something was wrong with him," said Samantha. "He was nothing but trouble from the start."

Maverick briefly glanced at her, and something caught his eye. "What the hell is that?" he asked.

He stepped over to Samantha. "Give me that!" he demanded. He grabbed the portal gun from her back and stepped away. "What the hell is this?" He looked at Samantha. "Well? What is it?"

"It's a portal gun," she replied.

Maverick laughed. "Sure it is, and I'm a dragon. Let's see what this doesâ€¦"

Sam glanced over at Ashmore, who was looking at him. In his eyes, Sam saw that he was thinking the same thing as him. The Night Fury nodded consent.

Maverick turned away from them and aimed the gun. He pulled the trigger, and a blue ball shot out and hit the pavement, creating a large, blue oval. He aimed it closer and pulled the other trigger, creating another, orange, portal.

The soldiers gasped in amazement. Maverick laughed. "That's awesome."

They were now distracted. Out of the corner of his eye, Sam saw Ashmore's tail thump against the ground. Looking over, he saw the dragon looking at him.

It's time.

Sam nodded. As fast as he could, he elbowed the soldier guarding him in the stomach. The soldier doubled over slightly, and Sam whirled around, drew his katana, and brought it down as hard as he could onto the soldier's head. The blade didn't penetrate the armor, but the impact itself was enough to do damage. It was so jarring it knocked him out cold.

Next to him, Ashmore had swept his tail under two soldiers' legs, tripping them. In the confusion, he was able to bound over to the soldiers guarding Reuniclus and knock them both aside, freeing the Pok mon.

Samantha took her cue from them. She drew her sonic pulse gun and turned around sharply, breaking from the grip of the soldier guarding her. She pressed the gun against his chest and pulled the trigger. The resulting wave of sonic energy knocked him off of his feet and tossed him through the air. He smashed into the plane's hull and fell to the ground in a heap.

Samantha turned and shot the gun again, hitting both Brian and Joey's guards at the same time and knocking them away.

"Thanks," said Brian.

"Don't thank me, fight!" Samantha yelled.

By now, the other soldiers had overcome their surprise. The two Ashmore had knocked over had gotten back up, and the rest began firing.

"You wanna play?" Maverick yelled. "Alright then! Let's play!"

Ashmore had managed to rip the helmets off of the soldiers he had knocked over. With a swift wipe of his claws, he killed both of them. Then, he turned and pounced on another.

Behind Sam, Samantha had taken on the two soldiers that had gotten back up. Joey and Brian were locked in a gunfight with the rest of them. That left only Maverick.

Sam looked at his enemy, and was able to dodge a bullet just in time. He lunged for his helmet. In one swift move, he put it on and stood back up again.

He turned and ran to Maverick, drawing his other katana in the process. Once he reached the soldier, he swung both of them through the air, aiming for Maverick's head.

The man ducked just in time, causing Sam to fall forward. He caught the teen and tossed him over his shoulder. As Sam hit the ground, Maverick turned around and fired a bullet. Sam rolled over, just barely dodging it, and kicked out at Maverick's leg.

He stumbled, giving Sam a precious second. He got up and swung his katana again, putting all of his strength into it. The blow struck Maverick's shoulder, and it was so strong it jarred Sam's arm. But it hurt Maverick much more. He dropped his gun and stepped backward, yelling in pain.

Sam saw the orange portal directly behind him, and knew what he had to do. He lifted his leg and brought it forward, right into Maverick's chest. Maverick fell back into the portal and emerged from the other. He flew into the air, and landed on the ground on his stomach with a thud.

Sam looked to the others and saw that they had won. Every soldier lay either dead or unconscious. He ran over to Reuniclus, who was still missing a small chunk from her arm, but it looked as if the bullet had gone all the way through. All that needed to be done was wait for her to regenerate.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"__Yeahâ€¦ I think soâ€¦ I've never been shot before. It hurtsâ€¦"__

Sam nodded. "I know. Now, we need to get you out of here. Can you float, or do you need me to carry you?"

"__I should be able to float."__

"Alright," said Sam. He turned around. "Guys, come on! The others are in trouble! Lucas is with them, and he's a traitor!"

They ran for the truck, Samantha grabbing the portal gun along the way. Joey, Brian and Samantha piled into the front, while Sam, Ashmore and Reuniclus got into the back.

As he went to close the back doors, he saw that Joey and Brian's gunfight had put holes in the gas tank of another plane. The fuel from the two punctured planes had begun to pool in the center. As their truck began driving away, Sam had an idea.

"Ashmore," he called.

The dragon came over and looked out at the mess. "Would you do the honors?" Sam asked.

Ashmore grinned, and shot a ball of fire at the fuel. The vapors caught and the ground erupted with flame. As Sam closed the back door, the flame reached the planes and a massive explosion rocked the ground.

The soldiers were marching them at gunpoint through the city.

"Come on, Jack," Jean thought. "Where are you?" The Chandelure was their only hope. They were vastly outnumbered, and he knew that if they reached their destination, there would be no hope of escape. The alarm would be sounded, and the other groups wouldn't be able to get back into the city.

They had been so stupid. What were they thinking, parking in an alley

where anyone who gave more than a passing glance could see them?

They turned a corner and beheld a large building covered in solar panels. _That must be our target, _he thought.

The procession continued down the street towards the building. When they were about halfway there, a rare moment came when their guards were the only soldiers in sight. That was when Jack made her move.

One second, everything was quiet. The next, a huge wall of fire surrounded them on all sides.

Soldiers started yelling. In their distraction, they were unable to contain their prisoners. Jean immediately took advantage of the moment and whirled around, grabbing the weapon of the soldier nearest him and ripping it out of his hands. He flipped it over and shot him in the head until the bullets breached the helmet.

Then, he turned back to the others, who were doing the same thing. The wall of fire shrunk, as it started to envelope the soldiers. Finally, as soon as it started, it stopped.

A battle had begun in the middle of the street. They pushed, shoved, and shot until finally they were able to slip out of the group of soldiers. The soldiers tried to follow, but a wall of fire appeared in front of them.

Thanks, Jack, Jean thought.

They kept running. "Get to the power building!" Dr. Shaw yelled. "There's a bunch of generators in there in case of emergencies. That means there's a lot of propane! We can still destroy it!"

Jean looked to Jeremy, who had stocked up on charges while they had been riding. They had found them among the other supplies. Jeremy saw his glance and nodded.

_Good, _ Jean thought. _He still has them._

From behind them, bullets whizzed by. As Jean turned around, he saw the soldiers emerging from the fire, shooting in their direction.

_These suits must be fireproof, _ Jean thought. He turned around and fired a few shots of his own.

"Get to cover!" Alex yelled. They reached an alley and immediately ducked into it.

"Jack!" Kody yelled. "Do something!"

The Chandelure briefly appeared next to them. She nodded, and disappeared again. Moments later, another wall of fire appeared next to the alley.

They made another run for it. The fire cut off the soldiers' vision, but not their bullets. A few made it through. Most of their blind shots were way off, but some came close to hitting them.

They finally reached their destination. They approached the door, and just as they arrived, two more groups of soldiers appeared on either side of them. They lifted their guns to shoot.

Jean grabbed the door and yanked it open. As the bullets started to fly, they rushed into the building. He slammed the door shut behind them and locked it.

The monitor flung itself into the soldier, knocking him through the air and beating him to the ground.

Lucas immediately drew his gun. "Where are you, ghost?" he yelled.

On the other side of the room, a chair lifted itself into the air and threw itself across the room, smacking into another soldier and knocking him out. Lucas turned and shot three bullets in that direction.

The room descended into silence. "Come out and fight, you coward!" Lucas yelled.

For a few seconds nothing happened. Then, Gengar appeared behind a soldier.

"There!" someone yelled.

The soldier tried to turn around, but before he could, Gengar wrapped his hands around his neck and yanked sideways. The soldier's neck snapped and he crumpled to the floor.

The others aimed at him and fired, but he disappeared before the bullets could reach him.

Using the soldiers' distraction to his advantage, Ben decided to join Gengar in battle. He lunged towards the nearest soldier and brought his gun into the back of his head. He turned around and fired a whole clip into the soldier nearest Alena. At first, the bullets bounced off, but they eventually pierced the armor and killed him.

Alena drew her gun and started fighting as well. Matt and Trent were wrestling two other soldiers to the ground. Shade had tripped one up with his tail, and was working to get his armor off.

Ben shot at another soldier, but by that point, all guns had turned on them. He broke through their ranks, grabbed Alena, and made a run for the reception desk. A couple bullets pinged off his armor, delivering blows that felt like punches.

Finally, they reached the desk and jumped over the top, crouching behind it. Trent, who had followed them, was close behind.

Matt and Shade weren't.

Ben risked a glance over the desk, and saw that Matt was halfway there. He turned back to find Shade, and saw that the Night Fury was in peril. Gengar was throwing things again, distracting the soldiers, but one was still focused on Shade. In fact, his gun was lodged between his ear flaps.

Matt immediately lifted his gun. "Don't you lay a _fucking hand_ on him!" he yelled as he pulled the trigger.

The soldier looked up as the bullets smashed into his armor. He raised his gun to shoot, but before he could, one of Matt's bullets tore through his armor and killed him.

Shade sprung to his feet and bounded over. "Go!" Matt yelled. "I'll cover you!" He turned to the soldiers, who were still dodging furniture thrown by Gengar. Some of them had noticed their flight. He shot at them and they shot back. Shade jumped over the desk and crouched, just barely hiding himself.

"You hurt?" Ben asked him.

The dragon shook his head.

"Good."

Moments later, Matt joined them. "Shade," he said. "Are you alright?"

Shade nodded again.

"How 'bout you?" Ben asked Matt.

"As much as I could be at a time like this," Matt replied.

"Good enough."

"Lucasâ€¦!" said Trent. "That lying, cheating, two-faced prick! I trusted him! _We_ trusted him!"

"He'll get his," said Alena coldly. "Even if we die here, I'll make sure he goes with us."

"Hey!" Ben exclaimed. "Nobody's gonna die! None of us are, any way! So stop talking about it!"

Suddenly, a string of bullets broke through the desk, just barely missing Shade.

"Come on!" They heard Lucas yell. "Come on out and play with the big boys!"

"You were saying?" asked Alena.

"There's a hallway right there," Trent said, pointing to an exit twenty feet away. "We can make it. Move!"

They instantly started running. Shade bounded ahead of them and shot a fire ball at the soldiers. It hit the ground in front of them and knocked most of them off of their feet. The rest were highly disoriented. Taking advantage of the moment, they ran into the hallway and turned a corner into another one.

Now that they were out of harm's way, they allowed themselves to take a breath.

"That was close," said Matt. "Thanks, Shade."

Shade warbled in response.

"So what do we do now?" he asked.

"We wait," said Trent.

"For what?"

"For Gengar to pick them off."

As soon as he said that, they heard the footsteps of the soldiers running down the hallway towards them.

"Oh come on!" Ben exclaimed.

"Okay, forget that!" said Trent. "Run!"

"Come on, hurry!" Dr. Shaw yelled. "That lock won't hold them back for long!"

"What about Jack?" asked Nick.

"She's a ghost, she'll be fine!"

Behind them, the doorknob started turning. "Come on!" Dr. Shaw yelled. "This way!" She ran down the hallway they were in and stopped at a door. The rest followed her, just as a jarring pounding permeated the structure.

When they reached the door, Dr. Shaw opened it and revealed a staircase leading down into darkness. She flipped a switch on the wall and the staircase was illuminated. They ran down and shut the door behind them, just as the front door crashed open.

At the bottom of the staircase was another hallway. The white, tiled floor ran past the grey walls, and led to two doors. One of them was marked, "Storage" and the other, "Authorized Personnel Only." They were each on one side of the hallway. Dr. Shaw ran to the one on the right, the "Storage" room, and opened it.

"The propane's in here!" she announced. They entered the room, turned on the lights, and shut the door behind them.

"Whoa," said Jeremy.

The storage room was huge. It stretched back for what must have been a hundred feet, and was twenty feet wide. It ended in a large garage door, and was filled with propane tanks.

"Jeremy, do you still have those charges?" asked Nick.

"You bet I do," said Jeremy. "I've got four."

"That should be enough," said Dr. Shaw. "Put one on each corner. Hurry!"

Jeremy ran to the nearest propane tank and pulled a packet of C4 from a pack on his back. He attached it to the propane, but just as he

finished, the door burst open.

"Put your hands up!" a soldier yelled.

Jeremy immediately turned around and shot at him, knocking him backwards before finally killing him.

More soldiers entered the room, and bullets started to fly. Jeremy flipped himself around the propane tank and crouched down. Bullets hit the tank, and propane flowed from the holes onto the floor.

Around him, his friends were doing the same thing. More soldiers entered the room, and one came into his view. Jeremy immediately shot him.

This just got a lot more complicated, he thought.

Trent led the way as they ran through the hallways of the building. They could constantly hear the pounding of the soldiers' feet behind them as they gave pursuit. Every once in a while, they would stray into their line of fire, and some bullets would be fired; however, none of them were ever hit.

Finally, they reached a staircase. "Let's go up!" said Matt. "We'll see if we can find a window and get out of here!"

They ran up the stairs and opened the door on the second floor. Below them, the soldiers reached the staircase and started firing up at them.

"Go!" Matt, who was in back, yelled. They ran through the doorway, Shade barely squeezing through it in time, and continued their flight.

They emerged in another hallway, ran down it, turned a corner, and found another staircase. They ran up it again. This continued until they finally reached the seventh floor. This time, when they emerged from the staircase, they were in a large office building with a wall of windows on the other side.

"Let's go," said Ben. "They'll be here soon."

They ran into the maze of cubicles, getting out of sight of the door. Just as they did, the soldiers entered the room.

"Oh just come out and fight like real men!" Lucas yelled, giving a few shots.

They ran along a row of cubicles. Behind them, a soldier turned the corner and aimed at them. As the first few bullets flew, Trent turned around and shot back as he ducked into another passageway. The others followed him. They now had a direct route to the window. They ran as fast as they could down it and pressed against another cubicle to hide from the soldiers.

"Alright, who wants to go first?" Matt asked.

"Take Alena," Ben pleaded.

"What?" Alena protested. "No! I'm staying here!"

Shade stood up and shot at the window, shattering it. He then knelt down and let Matt get on his back. "Come on, Alena!" he exclaimed. Behind them, soldiers were starting to shoot, trying to hit them through the cubicle walls.

"No! I already told you-"

She was cut off as Shade gripped her shirt with his teeth and flung her over his head onto his back. Matt caught her and helped steady her as Shade charged at the window. Once she was steady, she gripped his neck as tightly as she could.

They strayed into the soldiers' line of fire. They started to shoot, but Shade was too fast. He jumped out and spread his wings, giving a few flaps but otherwise letting himself glide to the ground. When he got there, he allowed Matt and Alena to get off, before he took off to get Trent and Ben. "Be careful!" Matt yelled as he left.

Meanwhile, back in the building, Trent and Ben were being pinned down. The one good thing about their situation was that the soldiers couldn't hit them. Every once in a while, one of them would lean out and shoot at them, but other than that they weren't in the line of fire.

But that soon changed.

A small, roundish object suddenly sailed over the wall of the cubicle and landed in front of them. A grenade.

"Run!" Trent yelled. They lunged over it and ran back into the alley, just as a small explosion desolated the cubicle. They ran as fast as they could, for they were now exposed. Soldiers ran into the alley and started shooting, and they ducked into another one.

Ben looked over the cubicle walls and scanned for a soldier's head. He found one and shot at it, and it disappeared. Just then, glass shattered as Shade burst into the room a few cubicles down. Trent and Ben saw him, and started to make their way to him. They finally reached the dragon as two more soldiers appeared in front of them. Trent shot a few rounds as Ben got onto Shade's back, and then he himself mounted the dragon. Finally, Shade leapt from the window once more, and they were free.

Once Shade reached the ground, Ben and Trent jumped off of his back. "Oh God," Ben breathed. "That was close."

"Get to the car!" Trent yelled.

"What about the building?" Matt asked.

"What about it?"

"We can still do some damage!"

"Screw that, we don't have time!" Trent yelled.

"See that?" Ben asked, pointing to a spot on the horizon. A column of

smoke was rising above the buildings. "That means the others have already done their job! We can leave now!"

Just then, gunshots sounded from above them. The soldiers had reached the broken windows they had left behind, and were now shooting at them.

"Quick, behind the car!" Alena yelled. They all ducked behind the armored truck and crouched, taking advantage of its protection.

"Alright, Matt," said Trent. "Wait for a gap in their fire, and then open the trunk. We'll get Shade in the back and get the hell out of here!"

"Alright," said Matt.

Suddenly, a scream pierced the air, and the gunfire stopped. Matt risked a glance behind them, and saw a soldier falling to his death. The other soldiers seemed to be looking for something.

Or someone.

Gengar.

"Shade, now!" Matt exclaimed. He started to move. Before he could, however, they heard the sound of another engine. They looked down the street and saw another armored truck approaching.

"Oh God," said Ben. "Hurry!"

Matt lunged into the open and ripped open the doors. As Shade jumped in, he was about to follow when the truck arrived. It stopped right behind their truck, and the window rolled down.

"You guys need a hand?" asked Brian.

Alena sighed in relief. "Thank God," she said. "We thought you were some of their men."

"Nope," said Brian. "Now, what do you say we destroy this building?"

"How do you propose we do that?" asked Alena. "In case you didn't notice, we're kind of pinned down."

The gunfire had started up again. Bullets pinged against the other side of their truck. As this was happening, Gengar appeared next to them.

"Hey," said Matt. "How are you holding up?"

Gengar nodded, signaling that he was okay.

Brian reached into his pocket and pulled out his walkie. "Hey, Sam, you and Ashmore get out here," he said into it.

The back door of their truck opened, and Sam jumped out and ran as fast as he could, jumping behind the other truck. Following him was another salvo of gunfire. Once it had cleared up, Ashmore followed,

and Sam slammed the door.

"Hey Ash!" Shade greeted. "How'd things go with you?"

"Hey," Ashmore said. "Not well, unfortunately. We were attacked, and barely got the job done."

"Are you okay?" Shade asked in concern.

"Yeah," Ashmore replied. "Reuniclus was shot, but she's okay now." He turned to Gengar. "How have you been? Wreaking enough havoc?"

Gengar grinned. "Oh, you bet," he said.

Meanwhile, the others were making plans. Now that they had enough force, they could take out the building after all. "Me, Matt, and the dragons will shoot the building," Sam volunteered. "We need you guys to cover us."

"We can do that," said Brian.

"Good," said Sam. He turned to Gengar. "I need you to cause as much chaos as you possibly can."

Gengar smiled. "That's my specialty," he declared.

"There's one other thing," said Trent. "Lucas is up there. He's on their side."

Sam nodded. "We know," he said. "Let's go."

"Good luck," Shade said to Gengar.

"You too," the ghost replied. He disappeared.

Matt and Sam approached Shade and Ashmore. As they knelt down to let their humans mount them, Shade looked at his friend.

"Come back down safely," he said.

"Same to you," Ashmore returned. Once the humans were settled, they took off.

As soon as they stepped into the open, the gunfire from the soldiers resumed. Brian pulled his truck away and drove around to the front of the building, attempting to divert the soldiers' attention. Both Trent and Alena ran from the cover of the truck, seeking other forms of cover. Trent knelt behind a trash bin, and Alena behind a wall. Gengar, meanwhile, began throwing things at the soldiers again.

Shade and Ashmore easily avoided being shot, and looped around the building. "Guys, shoot at the building!" Matt yelled. "I don't care how, just do it!"

Shade and Ashmore slowed down to match each other's speed. "I say we focus all of our attention on this side," Ashmore suggested. "If we focus all of our fire there, we'll have a better chance at starting a fire."

"Okay," Shade agreed, as he flapped his wings twice to hold his speed and altitude. "I say we shoot about halfway up. That way the fire will spread more easily."

"Alright," said Ashmore. "You first."

Shade turned back and scanned the building. From the bottom, he counted six floors, and swooped in. When he got close enough, he prepared a fire ball in the back of his throat. He felt the familiar heat, and the familiar prickling from his old burns. Finally, he shot it from his mouth and banked away. Glass shattered as an explosion ripped into the building.

Almost immediately, Ashmore replaced him and shot another ball. Three times they repeated this, with one immediately replacing the other every time. Finally, Shade reached his last shot.

"Let's make this count!" Matt yelled from his back.

Yes, Shade thought. _Let's._

He swept in and took one last shot. The building shuddered, and a massive cloud of black smoke was oozing from the crater they had put in it. Finally, Ashmore swept in and took one last shot.

The building was still intact, but there was a massive hole in the side of it; one that was rapidly filling with smoke and fire.

Ashmore flew to him. "We tried our best," he said. "Let's get out of here."

They flew back around the building to find the situation more or less the same as when they had left. The only difference was that there were fewer soldiers. Gengar had been slowly picking them off.

As he saw Ashmore come in, Brian slowed to a halt. The dragon landed behind the truck, and Sam jumped off of him and opened the back door. He and Ashmore jumped in and slammed the door behind them.

Shade and Matt landed next to Ben. "How's it going?" Matt asked.

"Shitty!" Ben replied. "You?"

"Alright, considering. You ready to go?"

"Hell yes I am!"

Just then, Trent arrived at the truck, clutching his arm. "Let's get the fuck out of here," he said. "I've been hit."

"Shit," said Ben. "Where's Alena?"

"Over there," Trent pointed. They looked over and saw her getting into the other truck. "She's with them now."

"Alright. Let's go."

Ben got in the driver's seat, and Trent in the passenger's seat. Matt

ran around to the back door, opened it, and jumped in. Shade followed him, and he slammed the door behind him.

Ben started the engine and floored it, driving as fast as he could away from the building. The pings of bullets followed them. When they finally disappeared, Ben slowed down slightly.

Matt took a deep breath and removed his helmet. As it dropped to the floor, he sat up and leaned against Shade's belly. The dragon was curled around him, his legs and tail stretched out. He was looking at Matt, a mix of concern and triumph displayed in his eyes.

Matt pulled out his walkie and held it up to his face. "Is everyone accounted for?" he asked.

There was a pause for a minute. Then, finally, Alena's voice responded. "_Yep,"_ she said.

"Even Gengar?" Matt asked.

"_Yes,"_ Sam replied. "_He's with me."_

Matt sighed in relief. "Good," he said. He dropped the walkie and lay back against Shade, his arms lying around the dragon's neck. "We made it, Shade," he said.

Shade warbled in response, and Matt scratched underneath his chin.

Suddenly, the walkie sprung back to life. Sounds of yelling and gunfire crackled through.

"_Hello?"_ Alex's voice called.

Matt shot up.

"_Hello? Please, for the love of all that's good, pick up!"_

"_Yeah?"_ Joey answered. "_What's wrong?"_

"_We're in the power building and we're pinned down! We need reinforcements!"_

"_Alright,"_ said Trent. "_We'll be right there."_

Matt sighed, and laid back again. "And the fun never stops," he said.

For minutes, they had been pinned down. Jeremy had managed to cross to the other side of the aisle. There, he had planted his second charge. But more soldiers had entered the room, and he knew he wouldn't be able to reach the other end of the room.

"Did you make the call?" he asked Alex.

"Yeah," Alex replied.

"Good. They're our only way out of this, unless Jack actually decides to show her face. And even if she does, I don't know how she's going

to deal with this with all the propane on the floor."

They wouldn't be able to proceed until the soldiers were dead. And if that didn't happen soon, they were done for.

Jeremy leaned out of his cover and shot at the soldiers again. He managed to score a killing blow on a soldier whose armor had been weakened by bullets, but before he had gotten a chance to hit anyone else, another volley of enemy fire came.

Jeremy ducked back behind his tank, only to have a bullet fly through it and exit inches from his face. A stream of propane trickled after it.

"Shit," he said. "Jack, where the hell are you?"

"Alright, we need a new plan," Alex stated. "I'm gonna make a run for it."

"Alex, no! There's another way!"

"No there isn't!" Alex snapped.

Then, without waiting for a reply, he got ready to make a run for it. But, just as he was about to begin, a shrill scream rang through the room, followed by several gunshots from the soldiers. But they weren't aimed at them.

Jeremy risked a glance back and saw Jack behind one of the soldiers. Her "arms" were penetrating his armor, and he was screaming in agony. The other soldiers were shooting at her, but the bullets merely sailed through her body.

She finished with that soldier and moved on to the next one. He tried to run, but Jack was faster, and as she penetrated his armor, he stood still and doubled over in pain. The soldiers continued trying to shoot her, but some were giving up and fleeing.

Jeremy stepped out of his cover and shot at the now-distracted soldiers. His friends, one by one, followed suit. It took a while, but between them and Jack, they overcame their adversaries.

When the last of them had either died or fled, Kody marched over to the door and slammed it shut.

"Holy shit!" he said in disbelief. "Holy shit! We just killed people!"

Jeremy trudged through the mix of blood and propane covering the floor and arrived at the far left corner.

"Hurry," said Dr. Shaw. "They won't be gone forever."

Jeremy attached the charge and then moved to the last corner. He wanted to be as quick as possible; the fumes from the propane were making him feel light-headed. He finally attached the final charge, and they were ready to leave.

"Let's get out of here," he said. They opened the door and closed it again behind them. They ran up the stairs and out the front

door.

"Four blocks should be enough distance," said Alex. "Run!"

They sprinted down the street as fast as they could. For the first two blocks, they were met with no opposition. After that, it was a different story.

A bullet whizzed by Jeremy, and he turned back to see that a group of soldiers had arrived at the building. They were now giving them chase.

"Run faster!" Jeremy yelled. Bullets continued to fly, and one struck his back. It felt like a giant metal fist, and he stumbled whilst crying out in pain. He gritted his teeth and pressed forward, turning around and shooting back.

Finally, they reached the end of the four blocks. Jeremy turned around and looked at the building. In the skyline beyond, the John Hancock building stood, smoke billowing from it. He smiled at the sight.

He glanced at the power building, and saw a group of soldiers entering through the front door.

"Jeremy, what are you waiting for?" Dr. Shaw yelled. "Blow it-"

Her words were cut off as another bullet whizzed by. There was a squelch, followed by a huge splatter of blood. He turned to see Dr. Shaw lying on the ground, her head a mangled, broken, bloody mess.

"Get to cover!" he yelled. He jumped behind a building, and the others followed him. He looked at Dr. Shaw's body, and a sense of disbelief filled him. She couldn't be dead—could she? Then, the truth sunk in, and the disbelief was replaced with rage and shame poured through him. She was dead. _Dead. _Because of them. They had come to get her out, and they had failed. Now, because of their failure, their only hope was lost.

"No!" he said. "No!" He pulled out the C4 detonation remote, and before anyone could stop him, he ran out into the street.

"Go to Hell!" he yelled as he pulled the trigger.

There was a split second of nothing. Then, the building ripped itself apart.

A massive explosion deafened him, but at that moment, Jeremy savored it more than any other sound. Orange blossoms of fire erupted from the building's lower half. The blast grew until it encompassed the entire building within its flame. The walls caved in, and the roof collapsed. Flowers of fire bloomed from the cracks in the structure, and the solar panels were destroyed in its wake.

The soldiers looked back at the building in shock. Jeremy looked down at Dr. Shaw's corpse, hands shaking.

Suddenly, the ground started to shake. Jeremy lost his balance and stumbled backward. Buildings shuddered, and dust was kicked up.

All around him, he saw his other friends either on the ground or trying to pull themselves up. The rumbling was deafening and intense all around them, and Jeremy could barely figure out which way was up.

But all of that was minute compared to the loud combination of moaning and snapping that soon cut through the air. It was faint, but definitely audible, and it was coming from the John Hancock tower.

Jeremy looked up at it and saw it teetering; about to fall. The foundation groaned as it was finally pushed over the edge. More than half of the building leaned backwards before finally falling to the ground.

It fell slowly, but when it did, a massive dust cloud was kicked up around it. The dust gusted in every direction, and a deafening crashing sound echoed with it.

The earthquake stopped, and the noise of the wreckage cleared away. There was a moment of silence.

And then a deafening noise roared from beneath them.

It was heavily muffled, and seemed far away. But to Jeremy, it sounded like some kind of roar.

Then, the earthquake started again. Only this time it was much more powerful. Jeremy fell over in his shock.

"Well!" Evan yelled. _"That_ escalated quickly!"

"Is everyone okay?" asked Brian.

The earthquake had just ended. They had stopped in the middle of the street until it had ceased. Then, they had heard the building fall, and then felt the earthquake stop.

"Yeah," said Alena.

"Apart from the shit in my pants? Yeah," said Joey.

Suddenly, another sound boomed beneath them. Brian couldn't tell what it was, but it didn't sound good at all.

"What was that?" asked Samantha.

Brian opened his mouth to answer, but before he could, the ground started to shake again. Only this time, it was many times stronger.

"Hold on tight!" Alena yelled.

They gripped the handholds on the walls and roof of the truck, holding on as tightly as they could. However, as the earthquake progressed, it became steadily stronger, and they found it harder and harder to hold on. And, as time passed, they began to hear sounds of destruction coming from outside of the truck.

Finally, after a few minutes of this, Brian heard and saw that the building next to them was falling over- and they were directly in its path.

Brian hastily gripped the wheel and shifted it into drive. He pressed his foot into the gas and the truck shot forward.

As they cleared the blast zone, the building smashed into the ground, sending dust and rubble flying everywhere.

"Where are the others?" Brian yelled. He couldn't see them anywhere. "Where are they?"

They were nowhere in sight.

Brian wanted to turn back and find them, but just as he had decided to, the next building started to fall. In fact, every building on the street was falling.

They wouldn't be able to make it. But as he looked, he saw a turn ahead. They just might be able to reach it in time.

He sped up to the truck's full speed, and prayed. The building closed in above them, and for a moment it looked as if they were going to be crushed. But Brian wasn't willing to give up that easily. He reached the turn and took it, shooting out of the building's range just as it crashed down behind them.

There was destruction all around them. Buildings were falling into other buildings, knocking some over or just causing heavy damage, and sending debris crumbling around them. Dust and debris were raining onto them, and the destruction seemed to follow their every move. And just when they seemed to be out of its path, the ground behind it rose up like a wave.

"What the fuck?" Joey yelled. "What is this?"

Brian continued to drive forward as the wave of ground seemed to follow them. Buildings flipped over and sections of pavement flew into the air. Brian could hardly believe what he was seeing.

Finally, it all stopped.

Brian slowed the truck down to a halt. He shifted it into park and took a deep breath.

"Could somebody please explain to me what just happened?" Alena asked.

Samantha shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "But it's over now."

Suddenly, something caught Brian's eye. "What the hell?" he asked.

A giant, purplish, rock-like structure was rising out of the ground. It looked as if it were connected to something underground. Three large, jagged chunks of blue, crystalline substance stuck out of the structure, one on top and two on the bottom. The structure as a whole was about ten stories tall.

"What the fuck is that?" he asked nervously.

As the others turned to look at the structure, it thumped to the ground, sending vibrations through the earth below them. Slowly, another structure began to rise from the earth.

"Iâ€¦ I know what that is," said Samantha, her voice cracking with shock.

"What is it?" asked Brian. It looked vaguely familiar to him, but he couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"It's a Gigalith," Samantha replied. "A giant, shiny Gigalith.

"What the _fuck _is that?" Lucas yelled.

They had been pursuing the prisoners in another group of trucks, when the earthquake had struck. They had been just out of the danger zone when the worst of it had hit, but they were in a great place to watch. The destruction had shocked them, but also baffled them. It didn't feel like the other earthquakes that had been hitting them. Over time, it had seemed to get stronger, and more precise.

And then, the rocky monoliths had appeared.

Lucas turned around to Maynard. "Will you tell me what is going on?"

Maynard shook his head. "Iâ€¦ I have no idea," he said.

Lucas turned back, throwing his hands up in exasperation. "Well that's perfect!" he exclaimed.

As they watched, a third monolith began to rise from the ground, but this one was different. It was more of a sphere than a tower, and it was attached to a much bigger structure.

As it rose from the depths of the earth, Lucas felt a sense of horror creep over him as he realized that it almost looked like a head with two legs.

"Maynard," he said. "I don't think this is some wacked-out rock formation. I think it's a living creature."

"Bullshit," said Maynard. But Lucas could tell he was just trying to convince himself.

"Trust me, I've been seeing crazy like this for the past month," Lucas replied. "And I know this kind of thing when I see it."

The creature's body rose completely from the ground, and Lucas saw that the two monoliths were indeed attached to it. They were legs. As this happened, two more legs rose from the ground and thudded to the earth behind the first two.

It drew back its head and let out an earsplitting roar.

Lucas clutched his ears, trying to muffle the sound. When it was over, the creature began to walk forward.

"Do you believe me now?" Lucas asked.

Maynard nodded. He activated the radio in his armor. "Is anyone seeing this?" he yelled.

A soldier replied, _"Sir! I see it! What should we do?"_

"Fire the missiles!" Maynard replied.

_ "__Negative, sir!" _the soldier replied. _"The power's out!"_

"What?" Maynard screamed. "How?"

_ "__Hostiles in the city destroyed the power building!"_

"Son of a bitch! Soldier, I'm going to want the name of whoever's responsible for this!"

Suddenly, a glowing orange light emanated from the other side of the creature. A beam shot from it and crashed into a nearby skyscraper, slicing the top clean off and leaving behind a roaring fire.

"Holy shit!" Lucas yelled.

"Listen to me!" Maynard yelled into the radio. "We don't have the firepower to take this thing out! We need to evacuate immediately! Tell everyone!"

_ "__Yes sir!"_

Maynard closed the radio link and turned to Lucas. "We're leaving!" he said.

"But what about Trent and his pack?" asked Lucas.

"Screw them," Maynard replied. "This is more important. If they survive, we'll go after them then."

Andrew stared in shock as the leviathan destroyed the Prudential building.

"Holy shit!" Nick yelled in a panic. "Oh fuck!"

The soldiers had left, possibly receiving orders to evacuate. They were alone.

The giant monster slowly began to turn and face them. They saw its eyes for the first time; two deep, reddish-gold holes in its face. It slowly turned to face them and fired its beam again; they saw that it was coming from its mouth.

Several buildings in front of it burst into flame. The beam faded out, and the leviathan began to move towards them. It lifted one of its legs and brought it down onto a building, crushing a hole clean through it.

"Let's get out of here," Andrew suggested.

"Please!" Kody replied.

As they turned to go, Andrew noticed Jack floating in the middle of the street, staring at the massive creature. Andrew ran over to her.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We have to go!"

Jack didn't move. Instead, a wave of emotions radiated from her. Fear, extreme shock, andâ€¦ guilt.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Jack sent him a memory. Or, rather, a flash of memories. A white labâ€¦ Sam, Ashmore, and the PokÃ©monâ€¦ Some sort of experimentâ€¦ And finally, one word:

Gigalith.

Andrew looked up at the creature- or, rather, the Gigalith. "That's one of you, isn't it? Sam created it?"

Jack nodded.

"Andrew! Jack! What are you doing?" Jeremy yelled. "We need to go!"

Andrew looked at the Chandelure. "Come on, let's go," he said. "You and Sam can explain later."

They ran over to the others. The ground boomed and vibrated as Gigalith came closer. "That thing," Andrew began. "Is one of Sam's creations."

"What?" asked Alex. "That son of a bitch!"

"We can't worry about that now, though," said Andrew. "I just thought you should know." Then, he had an idea. "Let's get back to the truck!"

"Yeah!" Kody agreed. "It's right near here! Let's go!"

The truck was, unfortunately, in the direction of Gigalith. But while the giant had already gotten almost halfway to them, it was still far enough away. They could make it if they ran. They ran back out into the street. They ran a block as fast as they could before taking a left.

But when they arrived at the alley they had left their truck in, they found it missing.

"Whatâ€¦?" Nick asked. "Where is it?"

"It's gone!" Kody replied.

"No, really?" asked Jeremy sarcastically. "I had no idea!"

While Nick let out a string of randomly-selected profanity, Andrew turned back to see that Gigalith was almost upon them. "Guys," he said. "What's plan B?"

"Run!" Alex yelled. Without waiting for anyone else, he bolted out of the alley and down the street. The others ran after him, and they began a race.

When they reached the end, Andrew turned to see Gigalith reach their road. It opened its mouth, and an orange glow emanated from it.

"Guys!" he yelled. "Look out!"

A large beam of light struck the street. They ducked out of the way, and the beam carved its way across the road and into one of the buildings. Then, it looped back around and crossed the road again. Finally, it disappeared.

The beam had left a trail of white-hot fiery devastation behind it, creating a u-shape around them. Andrew tried to step over one of them, but found it to be incredibly hot; hotter than any fire he had ever encountered by far. So hot, in fact, that it burned him through his armor.

The only way out would be to run back towards Gigalith. But that was incredibly dangerous. However, not as dangerous as staying there. They would have to go for it.

Unlessâ€¦|

The building behind them had been struck by the beam. But it was at least five stories tall; surely the damage couldn't have reached the ground in the short time Gigalith's beam had landed on it.

"Guys!" he yelled. "Get into the building! We can cut through the ground floor!"

They ran up to the door of the building and kicked it open. But what they saw made their hearts sink.

The ceiling had collapsed from the earthquakes. There was no way forward. A hole in the ceiling gave them entrance to the floor above, but they didn't want to risk going any higher.

"Alright, never mind!" Jean yelled. "We'll have to take our chances!"

They turned back to the front door, only to be greeted by another blast from Gigalith's beam. They were missed, but the beam started a fire just outside their door, preventing them from leaving. They had nowhere to go but up.

They began their scramble up the mound of wreckage. As Gigalith moved closer, its footsteps caused huge vibrations, sending bits and pieces of rubble tumbling down the mound. They almost fell a few times, but quickly made it to the top.

On the second floor, there was still no way out except up. The ceiling had broken here as well, providing them with another escape. They kept climbing.

Andrew hated it. The higher they got, the more danger they were in.

But there was no other way out; at least, not anymore.

Finally, when they reached the top, they saw a set of stairs.

"Oh thank God," said Jean. "Stairs."

It still wasn't a very good escape, but it was better than the climbing. They took it. They ran into the stairwell and sprinted up the stairs. Finally, they were almost at the top. And this room wasn't covered in rubble, either. There was nothing standing between them and the doorway on the other side of the room.

The bad news was that Gigalith was almost there.

"Hurry!" Alex yelled. They started to run, but before they got far, the windows shattered. Andrew instinctively threw himself to the ground, and the others did as well.

Gigalith's beam pulsed directly over their bodies. Fortunately, it was over quickly. But now, the wall in front of them was on fire. In fact, the whole room was on fire, but still they had to push on.

Andrew ran out of the room into the hallway beyond. His heart lifted a little bit as he saw that a massive hole had been blasted in the wall ahead, revealing what looked like part of a fire escape. The problem was, the entire area around it was on fire.

But it didn't matter. It was an escape.

Andrew reached the ladder and grabbed it, pulling himself out over the road below. Directly underneath him was another fire escape. He climbed down the ladder and jumped off onto the next platform, looping back around until he reached the next ladder.

When he finally reached the ground, he looked up to see the others following him. When they all reached the bottom, they started to run. Behind them, Gigalith reached the building that they had been in, and brought its foot down on the far side, crushing it like an ant. Wood cracked and splintered as Gigalith lifted itself onto it to stomp again.

Suddenly, as they reached a corner, they ran into a another threat. A zombie turned around a corner to meet them. Following it were countless more; a horde.

"Oh shit!" Nick yelled. They turned around to try and escape the other way, but another horde had cut them off from behind. They were trapped.

"Looks like this is it," said Alex. "Fuck."

"No! We can fight them!" Kody yelled.

"We don't have enough time," Alex replied. "I'm sorry, but we're done."

Andrew refused to accept this. He lifted his gun and shot at the zombies, downing them left and right. He emptied his clip into them and paused to reload. And as he did, he heard a noise. It sounded

like a type of humming. He focused, and tried to hear it betterâ€¦

And was caught by surprise as an armored truck broke through the zombies' ranks, sending blood and zombie corpses flying. The truck made a U-turn and stopped. The window rolled down, and Brian stuck his head out of the window, shooting a zombie that had strayed too close as he did so.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked his dumbfounded friends. "Get in the back!"

Andrew ran to the back door of the truck and opened it. Inside, Sam, Ashmore and Reuniclus were waiting.

Andrew jumped in and sat in one of the seats on the wall. The others hopped in after them. They slammed the door and Brian pulled forward, just as Gigalith's foot crashed down where they had been seconds before.

As they drove through the desolated streets, Sam felt the stares of the others on him.

"What?" he asked.

"What the hell was that?" asked Andrew. "I _know_ you know what it was. Now tell us."

Sam sighed, and was silent for a minute as he tried to think of what to say. Finally, he said, "Her name was Gigalith. She was the only one of my creations that didn't make it. Or so I thought."

"Why the hell would you want to make something like that in the first place?" asked Jeremy.

"She wasn't supposed to be like that," Sam replied. "I mean, I wanted her to be big, but I was thinking more like Ashmore's size, not skyscraper size."

"So how did she get that big?" asked Kody.

"I have no idea!" Sam exclaimed. "I thought she was born dead! I checked for vitals and everything!"

"Uhâ€¦ dude? She's a rock," Alex explained.

"I knowâ€¦" Sam said. "But it doesn't make sense. She was still a living creature, and even if that did explain it, how did she get out of Aperture? How did she get all the way here? And how did she get so _big_?" As he thought more, some form of explanation became apparent to him.

"GLaDOS," he said. "She had something to do with this. I know it."

Minutes passed again, and then Sam remembered Lucas, and realized that his friends probably didn't know about him.

"Hey, there's something you should know," he said to them gravely.

"What?" asked Jeremy.

"Lucas is a traitor. He's been feeding them information this entire time, and he led us into this trap."

They were silent; completely dumbfounded by the news. Finally, Alex turned around and punched a wall. "That _goddamn asshole!_ _He _did this to us!"

They kept driving for several more minutes, until finally they pulled to a stop. Brian shut off the engine and everyone in the front exited the cabin. They walked around back and opened the doors, letting them out. Sam stepped out first, and saw that they were back on the interstate. The city was a ruin. Buildings had collapsed, and the once-great skyline was now a bonfire. Gigalith continued her rampage, but her actions seemed less deliberate now. She was calming down.

"We should be doing something," Brian said. "Why are we just sitting around?"

"We're waiting," Samantha replied. "Matt, Shade, Ben and Tim are still in the city, but we've been communicating with them. They're okay; they're on their way to meet us here."

Sam sighed in relief. "Good," he said.

"Guysâ€¦ Where's Dr. Shaw?" asked Joey.

Sam cursed himself mentally. How could he have forgotten her? He realized that she wasn't with them, and dread crept up his spine.

"She died," said Andrew. "She was killed by the soldiers. We ran into a bit of trouble."

Sam looked at the ground as sadness, regret, and anger caused havoc within him.

"God damn it!" Joey yelled. "Fuck!"

Suddenly, their walkies started going off. Trent's voice came through them.

_"__Uhhâ€¦ This might take a little longer than we thoughtâ€¦|_"

They were driving through the streets of the city, getting nowhere. They had no idea where they were or where to go. The buildings around them were broken and covered in flame, creating a blinding orange light all around them. The black smoke from the inferno floated into the sky, giving the illusion of night. To make matters worse, zombies had gotten into the city, and were starting to swarm the streets.

"Let's try this left up here," Trent suggested. Ben took it, and they were faced with more of the same, with the added bonus of a massive horde gathered in the middle of the street.

"Cross your fingers," said Ben. "I'm ramming through them."

Trent braced himself, and at the same time pulled out his walkie. "I'm gonna ask for directions," he said. He pushed the button and spoke into it. "Uhhâ€¦ This might take a little longer than we thoughtâ€¦ We're lost."

"What?" Joey asked them. _"Come on!"_

"I'm sorry!" Trent exclaimed. "We're in the middle of a collapsing city! That's on fire! It's a bit hard to navigate!"

Just then, Ben rammed into the zombie horde. Trent held on tightly as they ran over the corpses, their ride turning incredibly bumpy. As he tried to keep himself from hitting the ceiling, he spoke into the walkie. "Hold on just a second."

They were about halfway through the horde, when suddenly the truck jerked to the side. The ride suddenly got bumpier than before, and the truck drove at a more uneven rate. A loud _ka-chunk _echoed through the walls of the truck repeatedly. After another minute, the truck jerked to the other side, and they slowed down almost to a stopping point.

"What's going on?" asked Trent.

"I don't know!" Ben exclaimed, as he tried to accelerate, only to have the engine strain. "I think we popped our tires!"

Trent sighed in exasperation. "Shit!" he yelled. "We're screwed!"

The zombies outside were at the window now, and were trying to pound their way through it. They weren't getting anywhere at the moment, but it was only a matter of time before they got in. They wouldn't be able to fight them all off either; they'd run out of ammo, and then they'd be zombie food.

There was only one way out of this that Ben could see.

"Alright," said Ben. "To the roof."

"What the hell?" Trent asked. "What good is that going to do?"

"Just trust me," said Ben. "We have to get to the roof." He rolled down his window and started to shoot at the zombies. Once those nearest him were cleared off, he climbed out of it, shooting all the while, and gripped the top of the car. Pushing, he heaved himself up onto the roof, leaving the window free for Trent.

More zombies replaced the ones Ben had killed. Together, the two of them fought them off. Ben also had to help Trent up, as his wounded arm couldn't support his weight. Finally Trent was able to get onto the roof.

Ben then crawled on top of the back of the truck. He pulled out his walkie and pounded on the roof beneath him.

"Yo, Matt and Shade," he said into the walkie. "Get your asses out here."

Moments later, the back doors shoved themselves open, and gunfire spewed out of it. The zombies nearest the door fell to the ground dead, and once an opening had been cleared, Shade jumped out of the truck, slashing and hacking at the undead. Once he had cleared enough away, he leapt up onto the truck, then held his foreleg down for Matt. The boy grabbed the dragon's paw, and was lifted up. When he was high enough, he gripped the roof and heaved himself up.

"What the hell is going on?" he asked.

"We've popped our tires," Trent explained. "We need you and Shade to get us out of here."

Matt's face fell. "I don't know," he said. "There's a problem there. Shade can't fly us all at once."

"Shit," said Trent. "That's right. Damn it!"

"One of us is going to have to stay behind and wait," said Matt. "I don't want to do it, but that's the only way."

"No," said Ben. "Absolutely not. How do you know Shade can't carry that much? Have you ever tried it before?"

"No, but-

"Then how do you know?"

"We tried to carry a lot of weight before. About equal to the weight of three humans. He couldn't do it; he flew about a hundred feet before crashing."

"Well I don't see any other option," said Ben. "Do you think you could do it, Shade?"

Shade considered the proposal, and then nodded. He gestured to his back.

"Are you sure?" Matt asked.

The black dragon nodded.

"Okay." Matt climbed onto his back, and helped the others up as well. Once they were all on, the Night Fury took off.

Matt knew immediately it wasn't going to work out. Shade was flapping his wings as hard as he could, but he still was only barely making it off of the ground. Even worse, the dragon started to sink right into the horde of zombies.

"Turn around, Shade!" Matt yelled.

The dragon growled, and desperately banked, aiming back for the truck. For a moment, it looked as if they were going to land in the ravenous flood of undead. But Shade gripped the truck with his claws just in time, crawling back onto the truck and slumping onto his belly, letting the humans climb off.

"Damn it!" Ben cursed. "What now?"

"I already told you. Two of us will have to go first, then Shade can come back for the next." Then, Matt had an idea. "Look, the first two don't have to go all the way to the interstate. They'll just have to get to a safe place. Then, Shade can go back for the third. We can do it like that all the way out of the city. How about that?"

Nobody disagreed. "Who's going first?" asked Ben.

"You two go," said Trent. "I'll wait."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. If anyone's going to place themselves in danger, it's going to be me. I got us into this mess."

"No you didn't," said Matt. "Don't blame yourself."

"Hey, shut up Matt," said Ben. "Hell yeah it's your fault. But we'll all yell at you for it later. Right now, we need to get going."

Back on the interstate, the others were waiting for word from those in the city.

Sam, filled with guilt, was watching Gigalith destroy the city. He had created Gigalith, and he felt responsible for the danger she had put them all in. He wouldn't be surprised if the others blamed him as well.

His friends were trapped in that vortex of fire and death, it was his fault, and he had no way of helping them.

As he continued to study his creation, something strange became apparent to him. Gigalith's rampage had been steadily slowing down for a while, but now she was standing entirely still.

What is sheâ€|

As he was forming that thought, a white glow began emanating from her body. Something big was about to happen, and Sam knew it.

"Oh Godâ€|" he said. "Oh no!"

He hastily grabbed his walkie and pressed the button. "Guys!" he yelled. "You need to get out of the city now! Gigalith is about to self-destruct! If you don't move, you'll be in the blast radius! Nothing will be able to withstand it!"

"Guys! You need to get out of the city now! Gigalith is about to self-destruct! If you don't move, you'll be in the blast radius! Nothing will be able to withstand it!"

The four of them looked up at each other as they heard Sam's transmission. They then looked up at Gigalith, who was starting to glow with a white light.

"We need to get out of here!" Matt repeated.

"Go," said Trent. He knew what this meant for them. One of them had to stay behind, and he wasn't about to let his friends die. "You three need to leave, now!"

"No!" Matt exclaimed.

"Uh-uh," said Ben. "No fucking way in _hell_ that we're leaving you here."

"Yes, you have to! Shade can only carry the two of you! Remember, or did you already forget?"

"We can try again!" Matt suggested.

"No, we can't," said Trent. "If we fail, we'll all die. What good is that?" He sighed. "You guys deserved better than this. This whole thing was my fault. I should have listened to you, Ben, and I'm sorry."

"No..." said Matt. But he knew there was no persuading Trent otherwise.

"What about your family?" Ben asked. "What about avenging them?"

"That's up to you now," said Trent. "As my new family, it's up to you to avenge my old one. And me."

A single tear fell from Ben's eyes. He tried to say something, but couldn't. Instead, he nodded.

Trent reached into his pocket, and took out both his flash drive and the one Dr. Shaw had given to him. "Take these," he said, handing them to Ben. "You'll need them."

Ben took them and put them into his pocket. Trent then turned to Matt. "You find these scientists and kick their asses for me, okay?" he requested. "The dragons deserve their revenge. And you're going to give it to them."

Matt nodded, and without warning he hugged Trent and let out a sob. "Goodbye, Trent," he said.

Trent hugged him back and sniffed. Ben joined the hug, and then it was quickly broken.

Trent then turned to Shade. "I don't want you to blame yourself for this," he said. "Understand? It's not your fault you can't carry me."

Shade nodded, and a tear dropped from his eye as well. He warbled mournfully.

"You know, at first I was a little frightened of you," Trent admitted. "But I came to realize you're alright. Hell, you're more than alright." With that, he stepped forward and embraced the dragon as well. Shade wrapped his forelegs around the man, returning the hug.

Trent broke the embrace and stepped back. "What are you waiting for?" he asked. "Go!"

Matt and Ben hesitated, but then they jumped on Shade. "Goodbye,"

Matt said softly. Then, Shade took off.

Trent watched them go. "Goodbye," he said.

Now it was just him.

He sighed, and walked back to the front of the truck. The door was still open. He shot a few zombies that were trying to get up at him, and then jumped down into it, slamming the door behind him. He sat there, waiting to die.

In his pocket was a picture of his family. He always carried it with him; had been since the day of their death. He had never taken it out except for when he was changing clothes. He couldn't bare the sight of it before; it brought so much unbearable pain. But he had always held onto it.

He reached into his pocket and took it out, unfolding it before him. It was a picture of his wife and daughter.

He remembered the day they had died. He had come back from the awful events of the concert, only to find the front door open. There was blood on the floor, and as he rushed in, he saw a zombie eating his wife's corpse. His daughter was dead on the other side of the room. In a fit of rage, he had grabbed a butcher knife and stabbed the zombie multiple times in the face, and even more after it was finally dead. Then, he had dropped the knife to the ground and knelt over his dead wife's body.

"No!" had all he had been able to get out before his words were replaced by incomprehensible wails.

"I've never truly been able to get over that," he thought. "This whole quest was ruled by it. Ben saw this coming. I should have listened to him. But I was too blind."

A single tear fell from his eyes and landed on the picture.

"No matter," he thought. "I'm coming home now."

Behind him, the white light emanating from Gigalith's body reached a blinding peak of brightness, before it exploded outward. A wave of blinding energy moved in all directions, incinerating everything in its path. It wasn't long before it reached the truck. Trent's death was painless and instantaneous. But despite all of the bleak surroundings- the zombies swarming his truck, the burning inferno around him- he was smiling.

Shade flew away from the white light as fast as he could. When he finally made it out of the city, he kept flying anyway. He wouldn't stop until the explosion reached its end.

On his back, Matt and Ben silently watched as the broken city was swallowed by a blinding white light. The explosion lasted for a whole two minutes, before it finally gave way to an immense cloud of ash. The ash was so thick; they could see nothing of the once-great city that had stood in its place.

"It's over, Shade," Matt said. "Take us to the interstate."

The dragon turned and found the interstate from the air. He flew towards it, and in no time they had landed next to the truck.

The others there were ecstatic to see them. "We thought you had _died!_" Brian exclaimed. "Waitâ€¦ Where's Trent?"

Ben shook his head, tears welling up in his eyes. He slipped off of Shade's back and went over to Alena. "Oh my godâ€¦" she said. She pulled him into an embrace. "I'm so sorry," she said.

Matt went up to Shade and hugged him tightly, as did Sam to Ashmore. The rest of them stood around, tears wetting their faces.

Finally, when they were done with their moment of grief, they got back into the trucks. Ben hotwired a car and some of those in the back of the truck got in with him. Matt and Sam rode on the dragons.

Before they left, Ben took one look at the city and said, "I'll make them pay for what they've done." He turned to look Alena in the eye. His girlfriend met his gaze, and saw a frightening intensity in it that she had never seen in him before. "I'm going to burn them down. Every last one of them. I swear it."

Alena didn't know what to say. She just nodded. And then they drove away.

****End of Part Two****

* * *

><p>So, now that that's over... I'll let you digest that for a bit.

****I'm going to take a couple more weeks off, to catch up on college work and get Part Three ready. Then, I'll return, and we'll finish Book One.****

****And then... we go forward.****

****Until then, however... Goodbye.****

52. Chapter Fifty-One: Phoenix

****So here we are! I'm starting this up again, and I'm not finishing it until the first book of this series is finished. Hopefully, I'll be able to release chapters on Wednesdays and Sundays, but I'm not entirely sure how well that will work out. At the very least, however, you'll be getting one chapter a week, if not two. There are fourteen chapters left and then an epilogue.****

****Anyway, here's part three. Enjoy.****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

><p>Part Three:

****Avengers****

****Chapter Fifty-One:****

****Phoenix****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

A chill winter breeze rolled through the cold morning air on top of Rockrimmon Hill. The group was all gathered together in front of the memorial they had built in Trent's honor. It was a large, metal cross with his name etched into it. When they had returned from Boston the previous day, Ben had immediately gotten to work on it with the help of Shade. He was determined to leave something behind, even though they couldn't get a body.

Now, the memorial service had started. Each of them had tried to find either a flower or something else that reminded them of Trent to place at the base of the cross. They had placed the artifacts underneath the monument, and were now standing in a circle around it.

It was Ben's turn to talk.

He stepped up to the cross and looked down at it. A single tear formed in his eye, as he searched for the words to say.

"I'm not really sure what to say," he began. "This really just sucks." His voice cracked, and he stopped to regain his composure. "Trent, you were the first friend I made after Z-Day. I never thought I'd ever have another one, but you proved me wrong. I never told you how much meeting you meant to me; you've always been my idol. And then, suddenly, you were my best friend, too.

"But now you're gone. And the pain is just too much." Ben sniffed, and wiped the tears from his eyes with a sleeve. "You were a good person, Trent. Even though towards the end you were obsessed, you always meant well. And I'm gonna find this Machine. For you. Because you were more than just a friend to me. You were a brother."

He stood there, shuddering as he tried to hold back the tears. He didn't want his friends seeing him like this. Alena walked over to him and wrapped her arms comfortably around his waist. And there they stood for a long time, staring at the memorial and silently crying. Even as the others left, they stayed.

When they finally left, Ben returned to his house with Anthony and Alena. The three of them sat on his basement couch in silence, drinking vodka. It continued like that for what felt like hours. Not one of them said a word, until finally, Ben broke the silence.

"The house feels empty," he said. "Knowing he'll never be back." Yet another tear rolled down his face.

"I know," said Alena.

Suddenly, Ben remembered the flash drive Trent had given him. Or, rather, the flash_drives_.

He stood up. "Hold on a minute," he excused himself. "I'll be right

back."

He walked upstairs to his bedroom and opened the top drawer of his dresser, where he had been keeping the flash drives. They were hidden underneath his clothes, and he dug through the mess until he found them. Then, on his way back downstairs, he picked up his laptop and brought it along with him.

As he descended the steps once again, the others looked up at him. "Before Trent died he gave me something," he said, as he walked over to his two friends sitting on the couch and showed them the flash drives. "These," he said. "Just before Trent died, he gave me a new one. It belonged to Dr. Shaw before she died. There was something on it she wanted us to see, and too many people have died to get the message to us for us to just ignore it."

Ben opened his laptop and powered it on. Once it had booted up, he inserted the flash drive and opened the folder it contained. Inside was one single video file named, "The Truth."

Ben took a deep breath and said, "Here goes nothing." He double-clicked the file. It was a video file, and it opened in Windows Media Player. The first thing they saw was Dr. Shaw's face staring at the camera. She typed a few words on the keyboard, and then started to talk.

"Hello," she began. "My name is Doctor Emily Shaw. I am a former member of the U.S. Secret Department of Science. I am currently being held prisoner by the Phoenix Army in Boston, Massachusetts. I know the likelihood that anyone is watching this is incredibly low, and virtually nonexistent, but if you are watching this, it means I am dead, and there are things you need to know."

"To understand the Phoenix Initiative, you must first understand the Department of Science. It was formed in the late 70's as a means to further the advancement of our species. The government had advanced technology beyond what anyone believed, but they kept it hidden; strewn across labs all over the world. Now, they had a place to put them all."

"At first, wonderful things happened. But by the late 80's, it had become corrupt. They began creating new creatures- playing God if you will- simply because they could. And all that would have been okay if it wasn't for the cruel, inhumane experiments they performed on them."

"The zombie pathogen was created in the year 2001. Soon after, a nameless man approached the leaders of the Department. I know neither the name of the man, nor the leaders; only that the man is now in charge of the entire Phoenix Initiative. He is known only as the Boss."

"I do not know the names of those involved, but I do know what followed. A plan, known as the Phoenix Initiative, was put into place. It was a plan to rebuild the world, should the pathogen escape their containment and control. Nobody thought it would actually happen, but they had to play it safe. And so, everything was planned out. The army was trained, the walls were designed; everything."

_"__And now, they have put their plan in motion. They have taken over Boston and New York, and are trying to set up a safe haven for survivors. At the same time, they have been recruiting said survivors into their army to help their cause. But the final phase of their plan won't come until they activate the Machine. The Machine is a device that will wipe out all the zombies in the country. Once activated, it will send out a wave of destruction that will target the zombies, destroying them. Once it reaches the edge of its range, other Machines will pick up the wave and strengthen it.__

_"__Once the zombies are dead, the Phoenix army will comb the country, searching for survivors to bring to their safe zones. On the way, they will expand, until all of America is under their control. Then, they will move to other countries, slowly but steadily saving the world. Or so they would have you believe.__

_"__The original intent of the Initiative was for the Phoenix army to reinstate to Constitution. But things have changed. The Initiative has become corrupt. The cancer of greed and power has spread through its ranks, and they no longer wish to help us. They desire only power.__

_"__If they succeed, we will all become their slaves. They would have everything to use against us, and we would have nothing to fight back with. But there might still be hope left! If their headquarters is destroyed before the Machine is activated, it would scatter them. It might give you just the right distraction to try to hit their cities.__

_"__But above all this, remember one thing: the Machine must not be activated! Not until the Initiative is destroyed. The zombies, believe it or not, are the only things standing between them and their goal. Alone, we're hopeless. But with the zombies attacking them at the same time, wellâ€¦ we might have a chance.__

_"__I know how much I'm asking of you. I know that you might not even really exist, and I might be making this for nothing. I know it's unfair. I'd do it myself if I could, but I can't. Not alone. And like it or not, you're a part of this too. If you do get thisâ€¦ Please. Do what has to be done."__

Dr. Shaw looked away from the camera suddenly, as if she had heard a noise. She looked back, an expression of urgency plastered on her face, and continued.

_"__I have to go. They're coming. Go to Mount Washington in New Hampshire. Their headquarters is at the base of the mountain and the Machine is at the peak. Hopefully there's still time. Both entrances will be hidden. I don't know how to get into the Machine, but the entrance to the base is disguised as a mountain shack. Please. You have to do this. For all of us."__

And then the screen went black.

The three of them sat there, gaping, completely and utterly dumbfounded.

"Wow," said Ben. "I'm not sure whether I should be happy or terrified."

"What the hell was in there to be happy about?" asked Anthony.

Ben stood up. "We finally know where the Machine is."

Anthony stood up after him. "Whoa," he said. "Hold up just a second. Do you not remember what happened yesterday?"

"Anthony's right," said Alena, after standing up after them. "You're sounding exactly like Trent did! You're going to get yourself killed!"

Ben rounded on her. "I made a promise! I swore I would avenge him!"

"Trent is gone! And getting yourself killed won't change that!"

"I don't care! And besides, did you even hear what she said? This is our _last chance_!"

"Do you really think we can trust her?" asked Alena. "Lucas was our friend, and we still couldn't trust him! What makes you think we can trust-"

"Shut up!" Ben yelled. "Not one more goddamn word!"

Alena stared at him in shock. All three of them were silent.

"Don't you ever, _ever_ refer to Lucas as a friend again!" Ben commanded. Never!"

He turned away and stormed up the staircase. "Douche," Anthony muttered under his breath.

Ben heard him. He paused at the top of the stairs. "Get fucked!" he yelled. He slammed the door shut.

Alena and Anthony ran up the stairs after Ben. They ran to the front door and opened it just as Ben turned the ignition key in the Mazda. He pulled out of the driveway and drove away.

"Shit," said Anthony.

Ben drove through the streets of Lyndrich furiously. His rage was white hot. His fists were clenched around the steering wheel so tightly that the knuckles turned pale.

When he arrived at Sam's house, he parked the car in his driveway and switched the engine off. He sat there, took a deep breath, and then got out of the car.

He walked to the front door and knocked. Moments later, Sam opened the door. "Hey," he said. "Everything alright?"

Ben shook his head. "Not really," he said.

Sam hesitated, as if debating what to say, and then opened the door further. "Come in," he invited.

Ben stepped inside and slipped off his shoes. "Can I get you anything?" Sam asked.

"Call everyone" said Ben. "I need to talk to you all together. Now."

Sam hesitantly went to his walkie and did as he was asked. Then, they waited.

When everyone was gathered, Ben explained to them about the flash drive Dr. Shaw had given to them. Then, he explained everything he had learned.

"We need to go there!" Ben finished. "We can't let them get away with this!"

The room was silent. Finally, Brian spoke up. "Are you insane?" he asked.

Ben sighed and brought his palm to his face.

"We lost _Trent_ last time we tried something like this!" Brian exclaimed. "That was just yesterday! And you want to run off on _another_ suicide mission already? Come on!"

"What choice do we have?" Ben asked. "What other choice? Huh? Because I'll tell you right now, there's no way I'm running. Not with so much at stake!"

"This isn't our fight!" Brian yelled. "Survival is our fight now!"

"And you don't think they'll track us down?" Ben asked. "After what we did to them, you think they'll just forgive and forget? And how can you say this isn't our fight? Do you not remember what they did to Shade and Ashmore? To Trent? Do you not remember what they're _planning_? Have you _forgotten_ already?"

Brian was silent. "I'm sorry," he finally said. "You're right."

"How can we be sure about this?" asked Samantha.

Ben's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Lucas had our- well, your- trust. If _he_ couldn't really be trusted, how can someone we just met?"

Ben sighed. "You've been talking to Alena, haven't you?" he asked sarcastically.

"Actually, I have," she said. "I know she has trust issues, but she has a point."

"I don't believe this," Ben muttered. He tried to think of a way to convince his friends of what had to be done. And then he had an idea.

"We have to leave anyway," he said. "So why not at least scout it out?"

"Whoa, whoa, hold on," said Nick. "We have to do what now?"

"We have to leave," Ben repeated. "They know where we are, I'm sure of it. And as soon as they regroup from Boston, they'll be coming here, I guarantee it."

A silence passed through the room as everyone realized he was right.

"Crap!" said Sam.

"Yeah!" Ben exclaimed. "We need to leave as soon as possible! I'd say right now if we didn't need to pack!"

"How about dawn?" Alex suggested.

"As much as I hate waking up early, that's a good idea," Matt agreed.

"Does anyone disagree?" asked Joey.

Nobody did.

"Where are we going?" asked Jeremy.

"North," Ben stated. "If we're leaving, we might as well scout it out."

"Fine," said Nick. "To be honest, if what you're saying is true, we'd have to be the biggest cowards in the world to just sit here and do nothing."

"Thank you," said Ben.

After the meeting was adjourned, the dragons and Pokémon had their own meeting upstairs in the security room.

"Well," Swampert began. "What do you think?"

"I think this long, awful week is just getting started," Shade stated. "But I also think it's for the best."

"Maybe this will finally be the end of it," Ashmore suggested.

"Maybe," said Lily. "But then again, we said that last time, too. Knowing our luck!"

Elizabeth watched and listened quietly. She just wanted this whole ordeal to be over, and even though she was reluctant to follow Ben's lead, she would suck it up if it meant the end of all the violence and bloodshed that had plagued them.

"What do you think, Elizabeth?" asked Reuniclus.

She shrugged. "I think all this just needs to be over. I'm done."

"This is how that'll happened," Swampert explained.

"I know," Elizabeth replied. "That's why I'm in."

"You guys," said Gengar. "There's an easy way to do this. Me and Jack can go in!"

A spark of anger ignited in Elizabeth's chest.

"Jeez, Gengar, not this again," said Reuniclus.

"He did handle things very well back there," said Shade.

"You're not helping," Ashmore snapped. He turned to Gengar.

"Absolutely not. You heard what they did to Reuniclus. It's only a matter of time before they come up with a weapon that can kill you as well."

"Overnight?" Gengar asked skeptically. "I don't think even they are that smart."

"We're not having this argument again," said Swampert. "You'll die if you try this, I know it. They've had more than just overnight, remember. I know you're trying to help, but getting yourself killed isn't going to help anything."

Elizabeth couldn't believe how arrogant Gengar could be sometimes. She knew he wasn't done arguing, and she was infuriated by it.

"You guys don't understand," said Gengar. "You think I'm vulnerable just because of what happened in Gunnerville that one time. But I've learned from that, and I've gotten stronger! If you'll just let me--"

"No," said Elizabeth with finality. "Forget it. It's not happening."

"Oh here we go again," Swampert muttered.

"You're not intimidating me, if that's what you're trying to do," said Gengar.

"I'm not trying to intimidate anyone," said Elizabeth. "I'm just letting you know that if you think you can get our permission to commit suicide, you're wrong."

"You know, I don't remember ever saying I cared about your opinion," Gengar retorted.

"You think you're so tough?" asked Elizabeth. "You think you can kill a whole army by yourself?" She stood up. "Then let's see if you can start with me!"

"Don't start this again!" said Lily. "Please! We've got enough on our minds!"

"No," said Elizabeth. "Someone needs to teach this prick a lesson."

Gengar smiled, and levitated off of the ground. "Let's go then," he said. "Or are you too scared?"

That did it. White hot rage flooded through Elizabeth's mind. She ran forward and jumped into the air at Gengar, reaching out her leg in an

attempt to kick him. But she sailed right through him, and almost hit Ashmore. The dragon ducked out of the way just in time, and Elizabeth crumpled to the floor in a heap.

Gengar's laugh echoed through the room. He appeared right behind Elizabeth, and conjured a ball of ghostly energy in his hands. "You're forgetting something," he said. "Ghost is immune to fighting."

He flung the ball at her. As it impacted, pain spread through her. But not much.

"You're forgetting something as well," she said. "Ghost is weak to Dark."

She reached inside herself and found her source of dark energy. As it flowed through her, she began to glow slightly. The glow was a dark, purplish-red color. Gengar nervously disappeared, but it was too late. The Scrafty shot her jaws forward and bit Gengar's leg. Her dark energy allowed her to grip it and bite down hard. Her sharp teeth pierced his skin and made him shriek in pain.

"Elizabeth, stop it!" Ashmore commanded. She reluctantly let go, and Gengar shot away. He disappeared, but Elizabeth knew it wasn't the end of it.

"This is gonna be a long night," she head Ashmore say to Shade. She couldn't help but agree.

53. Chapter Fifty-Two: The War Begins

****This is a shorter chapter. I'm gonna see if I can get the next chapter up by Wednesday. Until then, enjoy!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon or HTTYD.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifty-Two:

****The War Begins****

****Harristown, New Hampshire****

"You did great back there, Maverick," Lucas said as he took a sip of his beer. "I'll make sure you get a suitable reward."

"Thank you," Maverick replied. He took a sip of his beer as well. It was warm, but better than nothing.

According to his superiors, he had performed excellently in Boston. He and the surviving members of his party had returned halfway through the evacuation. There, he had helped things along. Many of the men were panicking, creating disorder and chaos. But Maverick had taken control where he could. He was a natural leader. Not only that, but he had risked his life by running into burning, collapsing buildings to recover trapped soldiers and equipment. Needless to say, Lucas and General Maynard were impressed.

Lucas pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and offered one to Maverick. "Cigarette?" he asked.

Maverick shook his head. "No thanks," he said. "I don't smoke."

"Suit yourself," said Lucas. He took the cigarette for himself, putting it in his mouth and lighting it. He took a puff, then removed it from his mouth, blowing out a stream of smoke.

They were sitting on a bench in the middle of a makeshift camp they had set up in Harristown waiting for orders. In the house nearest them, Maynard was conversing with their superiors. Lucas didn't know what was going on, and he could only imagine how much trouble they were in.

Suddenly, Maynard exited the house. "Lucas!" he barked, his tone suggesting severe irritation. "He wants to speak with you."

Lucas sighed, smothered his cigarette on the bench, and stood up. "Corvus?" he asked. "Or Giovanni?"

"Giovanni," Maynard replied.

"I thought so." Of all of their superiors, Giovanni was the most annoying and hard to deal with. He was essential to the operation as the head of the political division, but that didn't make him any easier to work with.

As they entered the house, Lucas sighed as he saw the screen that had been set up. Giovanni's face was displayed upon it, with the sleek, stainless steel walls of the headquarters behind him. He was a short man of Italian descent. His short, black hair was starting to recede in his middle age, but his green eyes still showed the ferocity of his ambitious soul. A thick black mustache curved around his mouth and formed a black goatee.

At the moment, his expression was so furious it caused Lucas to hesitate slightly, much to his dismay.

He walked forward, stopped in front of the screen, and hung his head, feigning shame. He was ashamed, somewhat, but he would have never allowed himself to show it under normal circumstances, but he knew that the less he defended himself, the shorter the confrontation would last.

"Forgive me, sir," he said.

"__Forgiveâ€¦! I don't know where to start with you, but it sure as hell aint' with forgiveness! In fact, the only reason I'm not exiling you for this is because of your father!"__

Lucas grinned inwardly. You wish that was the only reason, _he thought.

"Now, tell me again what your orders were!" Giovanni commanded.

Lucas looked at him and raised an eyebrow in confusion. "Sir?" he asked.

_"__You heard me!"_ Giovanni snapped. _"And don't give me that look!"_

Lucas recanted his orders. "I was to bring the targets into Boston and capture them," he said.

_"__And tell me: who in this mission was expendable?"_

"Those in the convoy that was sent out," Lucas replied. "Their actions led to their loyalty being questioned, and we have no need of such men."

_"__I don't give a shit about why, I just wanted to know who!"_ Giovanni yelled. _"Who else?"_

"Sir?"

_"__Who else was expendable, damn it!"_

"Nobody, sir-"

"_Then why the fuck is Boston currently a smoldering pile of wreckage?"_

"I'm sorry, sir," said Lucas. "I never meant for that to happen."

_"__You better not have!"_ Giovanni yelled. _"Or I'd have you skinned alive where you stand! Now what the fuck happened?"_

"It was out of our control. Something intervened, some huge creature-"

_"__I know about that,"_ said Giovanni. _"General Maynard told me all about it. My question to you is, why was it not killed on sight?"_

"Wellâ€¦ The prisoners escaped and cut off our electricity. Our missiles were disabled."

_"__See then? It is your fault!"_ Giovanni scolded. _"You've really fucked up this time, Lucas! There will be consequences!"_ He sighed. _"But not now. A new order just came in from the Boss. He has a new mission for you and Maynard. The General will inform you of the details. Don't fail me again, Lucas, or not even your father will be able to save you!"_

Lucas couldn't help but laugh, breaking his act. "I'd like to see that," he said.

_"__What the fuck did you just say to me?"_ Giovanni demanded. Instead of answering, Lucas reached to switch off the screen. _"Don't you dare turn me off-!"_

The screen went black.

"He's gonna be pissed when we get back," Maynard remarked.

"I don't care," said Lucas. "Screw him." He stormed out of the

building, with Maynard close behind.

Lucas stopped to light a cigarette. "I hate sucking up to him like that," he said. "Every part of me wants to fight back."

"I'm surprised you don't," said Maynard. "Why don't you?"

"Because the more I argue, the longer I have to talk to him," Lucas replied. He took a puff of his cigarette and sighed. "So what's this new mission?" he asked.

"You're gonna like this," said Maynard. "We're gonna burn Lyndrich to the ground. We're going to take as many of them prisoner as we can, but in truth, the only one we need to take alive is the scientist."

"Sam?" asked Lucas. "Well, he's not really much of a scientist, more like a kid in way over his head."

"Whatever. We're taking him alive regardless."

"We better bring a lot of men, then," said Lucas. "He's got some serious firepower on his side."

"I'm way ahead of you," Maynard explained. "We're bringing everyone and everything."

Lucas smiled. "Perfect," he said.

Suddenly, a beep came from the General's armor. It was his radio. He pressed a button on his arm and spoke into it. "What's up?" he asked.

"Sir!" a soldier exclaimed. "The scouting party is back!"

"Send them to me," he ordered. He looked to Lucas. "This might be able to help us," he said.

Lucas looked over to Maverick, who was still sitting on the bench. "Should we let him in on it?" he asked.

Maynard shrugged. "I don't see why not," he said.

"And besides, Freyley and Dufresne didn't make it out of Boston," said Lucas. "They're going to need replacements."

"What?" asked Maynard, surprised. "You think he's the one?"

"I think he's a candidate," Lucas replied.

"We'll see," said Maynard. "The decision has to go through the Boss. For now, let's focus on the task at hand."

Lucas nodded, and looked back to Maverick. "Oy!" he yelled. "Get over here!"

Maverick looked to him, stood up, and started walking over. When he reached them, Maynard explained the mission. When he was done, Maverick smiled. "That sounds excellent," he said.

Moments later, a truck arrived at the scene. Several soldiers got out of it. Their leader walked forward, coming to a stop in front of Maynard. "Sir!" he exclaimed, saluting.

"At ease," Maynard commanded. "What did you find?"

"There's an army base not far from here," the soldier reported. "It's in ruins, but it looks like there are still some things we can scavenge."

"Good," said Maynard. "That will help."

"Sir?"

"We've been assigned another mission," Maynard explained. "And we need to do it tonight."

"But sirâ€¦"

"What is it?"

"The place is absolutely crawling with zombies."

"That is a problemâ€¦" Maynard sighed.

"We have enough firepower to take them out," Lucas suggested.

"Yes," Maynard agreed. "Firepower that could be put to better use to stop a several-ton fire-breathing monster from eating us. Next idea."

They all tried their best to think of something. But it was Maverick who spoke up.

"I have an idea," he said, a devious smile plastered onto his face.

54. Chapter 53: The Crucible of Lyndrich Pt1

****Here's the next chapter! I did it on time guys!****

****Anyway, this is part one of another two part chapter. Part Two is to come on Sunday. Hope you enjoy it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifty-Three:

****The Crucible of Lyndrich, Part One****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

"Are you ready to go?"

Lily was jolted out of her daze by Ashmore's booming voice. The spider looked up at the dragon and nodded.

"Yeah," she said. "I just need some time to say goodbye to this place." She had lived here her entire life, and now she was leaving, possibly never to return. It didn't feel right, and it filled her heart with a deep melancholy.

"Take your time," Ashmore said. "We still have a few hours until dawn."

Outside, the generator hummed. The sound of it lulled Lily back into a trance created by her emotions.

Ashmore, noticing her inattention to the security panels they were supposed to be watching, said, "You can go if you want. I'll take care of this."

Lily snapped out of her trance again. "What?"

"I said, you can't what?" Ashmore trailed off as a sharp, shrill ringing interrupted them. It was small, yet the high pitch pierced their ears. They both looked over to the security panel and saw a red warning light representing one of the motion detectors.

"That's not the normal warning," said Lily with concern. "What's going on?"

Ashmore looked at the panel in worry. "That detector's down for some reason," he said. "Go and tell them. What the hell?"

Slowly, more and more of the lights began to light up, and the ringing alarm grew louder. And just when it was becoming unbearably loud, it stopped. A low, descending hum whirled through the house as the generator powered down, and the ringing alarm was silenced. The red lights switched off, and darkness and silence surrounded them.

Footsteps pounded urgently up the stairs. "What just happened?" Sam demanded as he entered the room. "What was that noise?"

"I'm here," said Reuniclus. "Tell me."

Ashmore explained to her what had happened. She then mentally relayed the message to Sam, who frowned in concern. "Lily," he said. "Power up the panel, would you?"

Lily nodded, and scuttled over to the panel. She found an opening, stuck her front right leg in as far as she could, and discharged her energy. Almost immediately, a shrill, deafening alarm blared through the room. Red light washed over them. Every single warning light was on.

Lily couldn't stand the noise any longer. She removed her leg from the opening and the panel died. As she crawled back into the open, she saw an expression of grave foreboding on the faces of her friends.

"What the hell just happened?" Sam asked.

"I have no idea," Reuniclus replied, thinking and speaking aloud at the same time.

"We need to get to the border and check on them," said Ashmore.

"But we're leaving soon, right?" asked Lily.

"Not for a few hours," Ashmore replied. "That's enough time for something bad to happen. We need to know if this is cause to leave early."

Reuniclus translated for Sam, who nodded. "You're right," he said. "Let's go."

"So they just turned off, then?" asked Swampert.

"That's what it looks like," Ashmore confirmed.

Once they arrived, they had investigated the nearest sensors, which were in the forest. All of them had shut down. But the strangest part was that not a single one had been damaged.

"Maybe they ran out of batteries?" asked Swampert.

"All at the same time like that?" asked Lily. "I don't think so."

"Maybe there's something wrong with the circuit?" Ashmore suggested.

"Maybe," said Reuniclus. She translated the idea to Sam, who nodded.

"That might be it," he said. "If I remember correctly, the circuits were in the church." Let's go there."

He turned to leave. Swampert was about to follow, when a familiar scent reached his nose. A dead, rotting smell. One he was well acquainted with.

Zombie.

"Hey!" he exclaimed. "Look out!"

A loud moan came from right behind him. He turned to see a zombie emerge from the trees, grabbing at his tail fin. He swept it out of his way and pounded the ground with his forepaws. The earth swallowed up the zombie's foot, and Swampert swept his claws through its neck, beheading it.

Two more zombies immediately took its place. And then another two. And then more. The number increased until it seemed as if there were more zombies than there were trees.

Sam drew one of his katanas and started to hack and slash at the undead foes. Next to him, Reuniclus was shoving her foes back and immobilizing them, allowing the others to finish them off, and Lily was trapping them in webs and electrocuting them.

But despite their best efforts, it wasn't enough. The forest was too small of a place to put up an effective resistance. They were starting to lose their upper hand.

Sam swung his katana once more, embedding it within the head of a zombie. He ripped it out, turned to the others, and yelled, "We have to go back! Retreat!"

Swampert turned to face him just in time to see a zombie grab him and pull him back. Sam struggled to get free, but the zombie held on and began to reach with his jaws for his exposed neck.

No! Swampert thought. _Not him!_ He pounded his foot into the ground and a tremor vibrated from it. A small fissure opened up and the zombie fell in, dragging Sam with him. Swampert bounded over, grabbed the boy, and wrenched him out of the zombie's grasp.

As the fissure closed around the zombie, sealing it beneath the earth, Swampert flung Sam onto his back.

"Everyone, run!" he yelled. Together, they burst through the ranks of the zombies back in the direction of the house.

Sam burst through the front door in a hurry. "We have to leave!" he announced. "Now!"

Elizabeth sat up in shock, and the ghosts materialized in the air. A concerned feeling radiated from Jack's body. She wanted to know what had happened.

"There's a massive horde on its way here," Ashmore explained. Behind him, Sam shut the front door and locked it.

Worry struck their hearts, and anxiety pooled in the wounds it left. "How close are they?" Elizabeth asked.

"We don't know," said Swampert. "They might have followed us, they might have not. But we need to get ready to leave."

"Why?" asked Gengar. "We can fight them off."

Swampert rounded on him. "Because something isn't right here!" he yelled. "Every single thing that runs on electricity just shut down for no apparent reason, and now there's a small army of zombies on our doorstep! It doesn't take a genius, Gengar, and I have neither the time nor the patience to argue with you right now!"

Gengar floated back a little bit, and held up his hands. "Whoa, calm down," he said. "I was just asking, that's all."

Swampert sighed, and looked down. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm nervous, that's all."

"It's okay," said Gengar. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Yeah," said Swampert. "Be ready to leave. That goes for the rest of you, too."

"Damn it!" Sam cursed. He tossed his walkie-talkie onto the couch in frustration. "The walkies aren't working either. We can't warn the others." He sighed. "I'll go get my backpack. Then, we're heading out."

He ran upstairs and retrieved his backpack, which he had packed earlier that night. Then, he remembered the new weapon he had acquired a couple weeks before his friends had arrived in Lyndrich. He had been practicing with it, but he had yet to use it in a fight. He supposed now was as good a time as ever. He reached under his bed and pulled out his large, beautiful black crossbow. He fastened it into a holder on his side, and attached a quiver of arrows to his outfit as well.

He returned to the others with his stuff together. "You guys ready to go?" he asked.

_"__Yep,"_ said Reuniclus. _"Let's get out of here."_

Sam walked towards the front door, and was about to open it, when something large pounded from the other side. They all froze in place and listened.

A loud, undead moan came from whatever was on the other side of the door. Gradually, other moans joined in, creating a loud, undead cacophony. Several thumps sounded at once, and the walls began to shake.

Sam slowly backed away from the door. "Howâ€¦ How did they get here so quickly?"

The window next to the door began to shudder, and through it, Sam saw the shape of a zombie. Several more joined it, and the glass shattered.

"Out through the back door!" Sam yelled as the zombies began to flow in. The eight of them ran to the slider door and pulled it open. To his dismay, he saw that the backyard was filled with zombies as well.

"Alright guys!" he yelled. "Clear a path to the woods!"

He drew his katana and charged down the stairs. When he reached the zombies he hacked and slashed away. Blood splashed onto his clothes, but he ignored it and kept fighting.

Ashmore and the PokÃ©mon joined the fight, and it wasn't long before they had cleared a path. Sam turned to find Ashmore, and he found the dragon fighting a trio of zombies. He clawed the first two in the face, and bit into the third's head.

"Ashmore!" Sam called. The dragon looked up, and let the zombies corpses fall to the ground. He bounded over, and as he ran by, Sam grabbed onto his shoulder. He was lifted into the air and used the motion to haul himself onto the dragon's back.

"Let's go, guys!" he yelled. Ashmore turned back to help the others escape. As he plunged back into the horde, Sam sheathed his katana and drew his crossbow. He removed an arrow from his quiver and loaded it into the weapon.

Let's hope that practice paid off, he thought. He aimed at a zombie and pulled the trigger. The arrows sailed into its skull.

"Yes!" Sam exclaimed. He reached back and loaded another arrow. He

shot it, and killed another zombie. For another few minutes, he kept this up, until the others had made it to the woods. Then, Ashmore made his way to them.

"Good job, guys," Sam complimented. "Now let's go."

"__Where are we going?"_ asked Reuniclus.

"To warn to others," Sam replied.

"Nope. The laptop isn't working either," said Ben. "Nothing is."

He had been asleep when the power went out. He and Alena had decided to get some rest- among other things- before they had to leave. Ben had fallen asleep, but Alena found rest eluding her. She decided to listen to Ben's iPod, but after she snuck it off of him, she found that it wouldn't turn on. Figuring that it was just out of batteries, she got up to change it. But as she tried to turn on the flashlight, she found that it wasn't working either. But she knew that wasn't out of batteries, for they had just been changed earlier that night.

She then knew that something was wrong. One by one, she tried everything else she could find that ran on batteries. None of it worked. Being the paranoid person she was, she felt- or, rather, knew- that something was wrong.

It was then that she woke Ben up. She explained the situation to him, and together they tried everything in the house. He even dug out his laptop from the backpack he had packed. It wouldn't work either.

"This is so weird," he said.

Alena nodded. "I don't like it," she said. "I think we should leave. I'm tired of waiting around for something bad to happen."

Ben nodded. "Alright," he agreed. "Go get dressed. I'll wake up Anthony."

Alena went upstairs. Ben followed, put on some pants and a sweatshirt, and opened the door to Anthony's room. He approached the bed and shook his friend awake.

"Whaâ€|?" Anthony muttered.

"We're leaving," said Ben. "Get up."

"Five more minutes," Anthony groaned.

"No. Now."

Suddenly, a pounding noise came from the front door. It wasn't a knock, though; it was more like someone was trying to break the door down.

"Oh noâ€|" said Ben. "Please tell me that isn't what I think it is."

More pounding joined the first, and Ben started to hear moans coming

from outside. "Shit," he said. "Zombies."

Upon hearing the dreaded Z-word, Anthony shot up in his bed. "What?" he asked. "Where?"

"Outside," Ben replied. "Get your stuff together. We're leaving."

Anthony got out of bed and hastily started to get dressed. Ben left the room and went to his room, where Alena was fully dressed and ready to go. Ben took his pistols, knives, and AK, and turned to her. "Where's my iPod?" he asked.

"Seriously?" she asked. "You're worried about your iPod?"

"Woman, give me my damn iPod!" he exclaimed. "I've killed men for a lot less!"

"No you haven't!"

"â€|Just give me the damn iPod!"

Alena relented, and tossed him his iPod. Ben caught it, put it in his pocket, and the two of them joined Anthony, who was waiting for them in the hallway. "Let's go!" Anthony exclaimed. "They're almost in!"

As he said that, the front windows of the house broke in. "The back porch!" Ben yelled. "Go!"

They ran down the stairs, pausing at the windows to stab some of the zombies. As they passed the kitchen table, Ben stopped to put his laptop in his backpack and sling it over his shoulders.

"Seriously?" asked Alena.

"No man left behind!" Ben yelled. He pushed past her, unlocked the back door, and flung it open, leaving his girlfriend confused and bewildered.

Once they had all left, they ran down the back stairs and towards the Mazda. It was surrounded by zombies. They pulled out their guns and started shooting. Once the area had been cleared, they ran to the car. Ben ran to the driver's side door and Alena went to the passenger's door. Anthony was stuck with the back seat.

"Ummâ€| Ben?" she asked, as she tried opening the door. "It's locked."

"Shit," Ben cursed. It seemed that, in the distress he had been in the past two days, he had relapsed into his old habit of locking the door. He hastily reached into his pocket to pull out his keys, and then cursed as he dropped them.

As he was bending over to pick them up, however, he saw something behind Alena. A zombie reached for her and took her by surprise, pulling her back and reaching to bite her exposed neck.

"No!" Ben yelled, drawing his gun. "You're not taking another one from me!"

Rage took over, and he pulled the trigger multiple times, shooting the zombie in the head over and over until the clip was empty. And even then, he continued to pull the trigger, ignoring the empty click that resounded when he attempted to do so.

The zombie fell, and its blood splashed onto her clothing. She stood still and hyperventilated. "Oh my God."

Ben finally ceased his dry-firing, and dropped his gun to the ground. Tears welled up in his eyes, and he closed them as he tried to hold back from crying.

Only Anthony was still alert. The rest of the zombies had reached them, and they no longer had time to get in the car. He grabbed Ben and pulled him away. "Come on, Alena!" he yelled. "We have to get out of here!"

Alena broke her paralysis and ran after him. The three of them ran down the street, away from the zombies. Occasionally, one would get in their way, and Anthony would shoot it dead.

Finally, when they were at the end of the street, they had outrun the horde. Ben stopped in the middle of the road and broke down in tears.

"I'm sorry, Alena," he sobbed. "I almost killed you!"

She stared at him in shock, and then stepped forward and hugged him. "No," she said. "No, no you didn't!"

"Yes I did!" he cried. "I almost killed you, just like I killed Katie!"

Alena grabbed his chin and lifted it to meet her gaze. "Listen to me," she said. "You didn't kill Katie. I don't care who you blame for that- blame fate, blame bad luck, hell, blame politicians for all I care. But do not blame yourself for one more second, you hear? "And don't you dare blame yourself for what just happened, either. You didn't almost kill me, you saved me. If you hadn't done that, I'd be dead. So I'm not going to accept your apology. Instead, I'm going to thank you."

With that, she kissed him on the lips. After the kiss was broken, Ben hugged her again and said, "I can't lose anyone else. I just can't. I don't have the strength."

Alena said nothing; only hugged him and nodded.

"Ahem," said Anthony. "Not to be a third wheel, but we kind of need to leave. Like, now."

Ben looked up. "You're right," he sniffed, his moment of vulnerability past. "Let's go."

"Where are we going?" asked Alena.

"I say Sam's house," said Anthony. "That's where we always go. Can we call him and ask for a ride?"

Alena shook her head. "We can't," she said. "Nothing electric is working. Which probably means the car would've been a death trap, now that I think about it."

"Oh," said Anthony. "Well fuck that, then."

The forest was massive and sprawling, and Matt had been lost in it for some time now. He had no memory of how he had gotten there, and no knowledge of where he was. He was alone. Nobody was in the woods; not even animals. It was completely devoid of any life or noise. His footsteps crunched into the dead leaves and snow, creating a noise that sounded deafening in the silence.

For a while, he had been wandering up a steep slope. He felt drawn to the top for some reason. He both dreaded and anticipated what he would find.

After what felt like hours, he was startled by a massive explosion in the distance. Over the trees, a gigantic mushroom cloud of flame erupted into the sky. The ground vibrated. Matt couldn't take his eyes off of the cloud, and as he watched, the fire seemed to form a giant figure. It rose out of a crouch, slowly but steadily. When it reached its full height it took a step forward, and then disappeared.

"Hello Matt," a voice behind him said.

Matt whirled around, instinctively drawing his gun- only it wasn't there. But he had no time to despair over this, as when he came face to face with the man who had spoken, all thoughts were obliterated and replaced by pure shock and disbelief.

"Trent," he said.

Trent smiled. "Did you miss me?" he asked.

Matt didn't know what to say. Tears welled up in his eyes, and a thousand questions burned on the tip of his tongue. But he didn't know how to say any of them. Instead, he ran up to the man and embraced him. As Trent hugged him back, he said, "I thought you were dead! How did you survive?"

Trent sighed. "I didn't."

Matt froze, and broke the embrace. "What?" he asked.

"I'm dead," he explained. "This is all a dream."

"Ohâ€|" said Matt, trying to hide his disappointment and confusion. "Where are we?" he asked. "And what was that _thing _in the fire?"

"Don't worry about that now," said Trent. "You won't be seeing him again for a long, long time, if at all. As for where we areâ€|" he thought for a moment, and then his face lit up with an idea. "Follow me!" he said.

He started to walk uphill through the trees, and Matt tentatively followed. After about a minute, he asked, "Why are you coming to me?" he asked. "Why not Ben?"

"Ben's path is different from yours," Trent replied. "While it is just as important, it doesn't require the same preparation as yours does."

"Ummâ€¦ okay," said Matt. "That doesn't help me at all."

"You'll understand in time," Trent explained. "Ah! Here we are!"

They came to a clearing with a giant boulder in the center. Trent climbed up on top of it and gestured for Matt to follow. He did, and Trent pointed to the view behind them.

Matt turned around and gasped. They were in a large mountain range. The hills and mountains were covered in dense, green forest draped with white snow, and they rolled like green waves onto the horizon. It was breathtaking and beautiful.

"Now you tell me where we are," said Trent.

"We're in the mountains," said Matt.

"Yeah, I know," said Trent. "What mountains?"

Matt thought hard. The mountains did look familiar, but he couldn't put his finger on how...

And then it came to him. He mentally slapped himself for not figuring it out sooner and turned to Trent. "The White Mountains," he said. "New Hampshire."

Trent nodded. "Good job," he said. "You need to learn to see better in these dreams. It will help you in the future."

"What do you mean?"

Trent didn't answer. Instead, he dodged the question and changed the subject. "I can't stay for much longer," he said. "I'm leaving soon."

Matt frowned. "Where are you going?"

Trent smiled. "To be with my family," he replied.

"Will I see you again?"

"One day," he said. "But hopefully not for many years. Anyway, there's something we need to talk about." He sighed. "I know the end may feel close, but it's not. Your trials are just beginning. You guys have a long, hard road ahead of you. I can't even describe the horrors that you're destined to face. But you have to face them, because if you don't, the outcome will be more disastrous than you could ever imagine. But if you do, and you _succeedâ€¦|_"

"â€¦What?" asked Matt, his heart heavy.

"It'll be beautiful," said Trent.

They sat in silence for what felt like minutes as Matt waited for

Trent to continue. When he didn't, he asked, "What is it?"

Trent shook his head. "I'm not allowed to tell you that," he said. "But I can assure you that it's great. There's something else, tooâ€¦"

"What?" Matt asked.

Trent sighed. "Before this leg of your journey is over, you're going to have to make a choice."

"What choice?" asked Matt.

Trent opened his mouth to reply, but instead, he doubled over in pain. "Argh!" he yelled.

"Trent!" Matt exclaimed. "What's wrong?"

"Listen Matt!" Trent yelled through the pain. "I'm out of time! He's coming!"

"Who?" Matt asked. "Who's coming?"

_"__You know who!"_

And Matt did. It was the hooded man from his dreams who was coming.

Trent looked up at him, and his eyes started to glow with a bright white color. "How much do you love your friends?" he asked.

"I don't understand-"

_"__How much do you love Shade?"_

Matt froze. "What's gonna happen to Shade?" he demanded. "Tell me!"

"I can't- Argh!"

Trent spasmed, and a series of cracks traveled through his body.

"Trent!" Matt yelled in alarm.

A bright, white light shone through the cracks, and with one last scream from the man, it burst outward, enveloping him. A split second later, the light disappeared, and Trent was gone.

"What the hell?" Matt asked, disturbed and alarmed. But almost as soon as it was over, another sound echoed through the mountainside. A Night Fury's roar of pain. And then, a crash.

Shade, Matt thought.

He ran towards the sound without hesitation. As fast as he could, he bolted through the trees until he finally reached a clearing. In the center of the clearing was Shade. A large, bleeding bullet hole was in his head, and his limbs were mangled from the crash. He was very clearly dead.

Matt couldn't speak. He couldn't move; the pain and grief were so intense. Finally, a tear slipped from his eyes. "No!" he whispered.

He crouched next to Shade's broken body and sobbed. "NO!" he screamed into the sky, not caring who or what heard. He leaned over his body and broke down.

For what felt like hours, he cried and sobbed, until finally, he felt a hand touch his shoulder. Startled, he backed away and looked up, right into the unseen face of the Hooded Man.

Matt bolted upright in his bed, gasping for breath. He felt around, realized where he was, and sighed in relief. He heard a faint warble behind him, as Shade was woken. Matt remembered the dream, and hugged Shade's neck as tightly as he could. "Oh thank God," he said. "I won't let you die. Not while there's still breath in my body."

Shade, meanwhile, looked down at him in confusion. "Uhh... What's wrong?"

Matt broke his embrace and looked at his friend. "I need to tell you something," he said.

Shade pricked up his ear flaps and looked at him in a gaze that was both comforting and curious. "What?"

Matt gulped, as he tried to think of where to start. "So, uh... I've been having these dreams lately," he said. "Horrible, frightening dreams. And normally I'd pass them off as just dreams, but they've been so _vivid._ And there's something else as well.

"I had the first one that night before I accidentally shot myself in Lawrence. I dreamed that Ben was in Chicago, and that he met someone," he paused, debating how to continue, before finally resuming. "That someone was Trent."

Shade's eyes widened in shock. But he sensed that there was more to it, so he let his friend continue.

"The next few dreams I had had two people in them. One was this horrible hooded figure, and the other... the other turned out to be Elizabeth. After we met Sam, Ashmore and the Pokémon, Elizabeth disappeared. But the dreams didn't. Neither did the hooded man, or the fact that they all took place in a burning city.

"The day before Boston, I had another dream. In this one, I was in Boston, in a deserted building. I went outside, only to see that everything was on fire, and Trent was trapped in a truck surrounded by zombies. Then, there was a giant explosion, and I woke up.

After that, he told Shade all about the dream he had just had. Everything from the forest in the mountains to Trent's message.

"And then, in the very end..." Matt stopped. The next part was more horrible to him than anything else he had dreamt so far.

"You were dead."

This one seemed to hit the dragon the hardest. Shade leaned back against the wall, his eyes distant and full of shock.

"You probably don't believe me," said Matt.

Shade shook his head reassuringly. _I do believe you._

"Well thanks," said Matt. "That makes me feel sane at least."

He leaned forward and hugged Shade again, pressing his face into the smooth scales of the dragon's chest.

"I'm afraid to go north," he said. "Something bad is gonna happen, I know it. But whatever does happen, I swear to you I won't let you die. Not while it's in my power."

Shade made no noise. But what he did do was wrap his forelegs around Matt's body in a return embrace. For a while they laid there like that, spending what little peace they had left in each other's comfort.

But their peace was broken with the loud bang of a pound on the front door.

"What was that?" Matt asked.

The pounding came again. And again. And then more joined it all along the front of the house. And then the moans came as well.

"Oh no," said Matt. He jumped out of the bed and looked out the window to see countless moving shapes on his lawn. Zombies.

He turned around to see Shade jump off the bed in alarm. "How did they find us?" he wondered. "We haven't done anything to alert them!"

Shade looked out the window to see for himself, and then withdrew in alarm. He walked to the door, turned back to him, and warbled. _We need to warn the others!_

Matt nodded. "Alright. Let's go."

He quickly put on a pair of pants, and then ran to the door and opened it, and they slipped into the hall. They immediately opened the door to Matt's sister's old room, which was right next to his, and currently inhabited by Samantha.

"Samantha!" Matt yelled. "Wake up!"

The girl groaned and lifted her head. "Wha's goin' on?" she asked, fatigue slurring her speech.

"Zombies," Matt announced. "Lots of zombies!"

Samantha immediately scrambled out of bed and went to put on some clothes. Behind them, the door to Matt's parents' old room opened, and Joey and Brian ran out, guns ready.

"Get your stuff!" Matt yelled. "We're leaving!" He himself ran back

into his room and grabbed his bag full of his and Shade's supplies.

Once everyone was ready, they met in the hall. "Hurry," said Matt. "Out the back-"

A loud crash echoed from downstairs as the windows shattered. The zombies started climbing into the house, and before anything could be done about it, they were swarming in.

"There's way too many!" said Brian. "We can't go that way!"

Matt thought for a moment, and then had an idea. "Upstairs!" he yelled. "Now!"

They ran down the hallway and up the stairs. Shade had trouble getting through the door, as he did not go into the attic often, and the door had not been eroded by his scales as other doors had. But he eventually made it through.

Once they were all in, Matt shut the door behind them. They ran up the staircase beyond, and emerged into a room. To their right was a door which led into Matt's dad's former office. To their left was a large room, with couches along the sides, a large sack of fluff used for relaxation in the center, and a large, flatscreen TV in the corner. There were shelves as well, with an assortment of toys, movies, books, and video games on them. The ceiling was slanted, except for a row in the center of it. Skylights were placed into the ceiling, and another window was placed in the far side of the room. It overlooked the roof of the living room.

"Shade," Matt said. "Fire at that window!"

Shade opened his mouth and produced a ball of fire that shot across the room and blew the window- and the wall that surrounded it- outward. When the smoke from the blast cleared, it revealed a huge, jagged hole. Outside was the roof, waiting for them.

"Sweet," Joey said. He lead the way out onto the roof and surveyed the yard below. "Holy balls!"

Zombies had the house completely surrounded. They seemed to be everywhere. The horde even reached into the road.

"Now what?" asked Brian.

"I think it's ob- whoa!" Matt exclaimed. Shade had run into him, pushed him onto his back with his head and kept running. He went for the other closest human as well, who happened to be Brian. He fell over the dragon's head as well, and both he and Matt held on for dear life as Shade jumped off of the roof.

"Oh God!" Matt yelled as he tried to maneuver himself into a good riding position. "Holy shit!"

They finally got in a proper position on Shade's back, just as he was landing in the middle of Jade Drive, a col-de-sac up the street from Matt's house. As they got off, Brian turned around and yelled, "Don't ever do that again! You almost made me shit myself!"

Shade snorted with laughter, and then took off again to go pick up the others.

"You useless reptile!" Brian yelled after him.

They waited in the col-de-sac, praying the zombies wouldn't find them, until Shade finally returned. With him was Joey and Samantha.

"Is everyone okay?" asked Brian.

"Yep," said Joey and Samantha.

"Alright. Now can we please get the hell out of here?"

"Right behind you," said Matt. "But where should we go?"

"How about Sam's house?" Joey suggested. "He pretty much runs the town; he'll know what to do."

Brian nodded. "I like that idea. Let's do it."

They argued to determine who would ride with Shade first. Brian and Samantha won, and they got on his back. The dragon took off and they began their flight toward Sam's house.

When they were about halfway there, they saw something. A black shape moving in the night sky. As they looked closer, they began to make out what it was.

"Is thatâ€¦ Ashmore?" Brian asked.

"I think soâ€¦" said Samantha.

Shade changed his course and shot a ball of fire into the sky, signaling what they thought to be Ashmore. The shape moved closer, until they finally saw its full form.

It was Ashmore. And Sam was riding on his back.

"Sam!" Brian yelled as Shade banked to meet them. "Hey!"

Shade turned and met them, slowing his flight to match Ashmore's speed and fly alongside him. "Brian! Samantha!" Sam greeted. "What's going on?"

"Zombies attacked the house!" Samantha explained. "We were driven out! We were heading to your house!"

"It's a good thing I caught you!" said Sam. "We were overrun as well. The motion sensors all shut down! Everything electronic just turned off! And then the zombies came! We were coming to warn you just now!"

"Well this sucks!" said Brian. "Now what?"

"Follow me!" Sam replied. "We're going to the town hall!"

When they got there, the dragons dropped off the humans and flew back to get the others. Upon their return, Shade carried Joey and Matt and

Ashmore carried Elizabeth and Reuniclus. Soon after, Swampert arrived, carrying Gengar and Jack. Lily was close behind.

"Now what?" asked Matt.

"We're going to get everyone else," said Sam. "Ashmore, go to Andrew's house. Shade, you go to Ben's. Evan's house is out of the way, so they aren't in as much danger. We'll get them last."

Both of the dragons nodded, and took flight. They returned a few minutes later, carrying people on their backs. Shade carried Ben and Alena, while Ashmore carried Andrew and Kody. Then, they returned for the others.

Meanwhile, not too long before this, the last group at Evan's house was getting ready to leave.

"Hurry up!" Nick yelled to Evan. "We're gonna die!"

The zombies were pounding on their front door, and it was only a matter of time before they got in. Unlike everyone else, they had boards on their windows, because they had lived in Lyndrich before the illusion of safety. But even those wouldn't hold them back forever. Not with the huge numbers the zombies had on their side.

"Holy shit, Evan!" Jeremy yelled. "Get your ass down here!"

Finally, Evan reached the bottom of the stairs. "Okay, okay, jeez!" he yelled. "I was just packing up!"

"You were supposed to do that hours ago!" Nick yelled.

"Yeah butâ€¦| shitâ€¦| I forgot my backpack."

Nick leaned his head against the wall, closed his eyes, and sighed in annoyance. "Oh my god," he said.

"Screw it," said Alex. "_I'll_ get it.Â´ He ran up the stairs and returned a moment later with Evan's backpack. "If you forget it again, we're leaving it behind," he warned.

"Alright, can we please leave?" asked Jeremy.

Nick nodded and turned to Alex. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" he asked.

Alex nodded. "Hell yeah," he said.

They opened the door to the backyard and beheld the beauty before them. The APC was big, and it took up most of Evan's backyard. "I'm driving!" Alex yelled. He ran and jumped into the front seat.

"Good luck getting anywhere without the keys!" Nick yelled. He went back into the house and produced a key. As they ran to the vehicle, he tossed the key through the door to Alex, and then jumped into a gun turret. Once everyone else had boarded, he yelled, "Start it up!"

Alex slammed the door and turned the key in the ignition. But nothing

happened. He tried it again and again, but it wouldn't start. He opened the door and got out.

"Uhâ€| Nick?" he said. "This thing won't start up."

"What?" asked Nick. "Why not?"

"How the hell should I know?" Alex turned to survey the yard and saw that the zombies were getting close. "Nick!" he yelled. "Do me a favor and kill these zombies for me!"

Nick tried to fire, but his gun wouldn't work. "Dangit," he cursed. He looked around and saw that the zombies were coming from behind as well. They were cornered, and the only way they could go was back inside.

"Guys!" he yelled. "We have to go back in!"

"What?" asked Alex. "Are you crazy?"

"No, he's right," said Jeremy, who was in the back. "That's the only way we can go. But I have an idea!"

"And what's that?" asked Alex.

"I can't explain now!" said Jeremy. "We don't have time! We have to get to the armory!" With that, he hopped off the back of the APC and ran to the open back door. "Come on!" he yelled.

Nick and Evan hopped off, and Alex ran out from the driver's seat. When they had all reached the door, Jeremy slammed it shut and locked it.

The zombies were almost through the windows, which meant they were almost out of time. They ran down to the armory, which was in the basement. Once there, they stocked up on weapons and ammo. Nick took a Steyr AUG rifle with an M92 pistol, Evan took a SAW and an M9, Alex took an M4 Carbine with a P-90 machine pistol, and Jeremy took an RPG and a flare gun.

Once they were done, he shared his plan.

"If we can get to the roof, we can signal the others with this flare gun," he said. "We'll be safe up there, too! The zombies will have to climb, and we can take them. Hopefully."

"Hopefully?" asked Nick. "That doesn't make me feel very good about this."

"Well if you have a better idea, I'm all ears," said Jeremy.

"We could fly," said Evan.

"We could fight," said Nick.

Alex shook his head. "Too many," he said.

Suddenly, a crash echoed from the floor above them.

"They've gotten through the windows," said Alex.

"Shit in a fucking bitch!" Nick yelled. "How the hell did they get here, anyway? Doesn't Sam have all the borders wired?"

"I don't know," said Jeremy. "But what I do know is that we have to leave. Right now."

Nick took a deep breath and calmed himself down. "Okay," he said. "Let's go."

They charged up the stairs and kicked the door open, shooting all of the zombies that greeted them. From there, they headed for the next flight of stairs and shot at any and all zombies that were in their path. Finally, they reached the staircase and ran up.

When they reached the top floor, Jeremy lifted his RPG and aimed it at the ceiling. "Get down, everyone," he warned.

Alex, Nick and Evan ducked out of the way as Jeremy pulled the trigger. The ceiling exploded outward, and Jeremy shielded his eyes as burning splinters or wood rained down on them.

Once it was clear, he looked up at the others, who were crouched down, shielding their eyes as well. "Guys!" he yelled. "Let's get up there! Stack some shit up!"

Jeremy reloaded the RPG in case they needed it, and then they set to work. They gathered boxes, furniture, and other things from other rooms, and stacked them in an uneven pile in the center of the room. They did it as quickly as they could, so as to avoid the zombies. However, they weren't fast. By the time they were done, the zombies had reached the top of the stairs.

"Hurry up!" Jeremy yelled as the door opened, and the sound of moaning drifted up to them. Alex was the closest to the pile, and he made his way up as quickly as he could. The pile shuddered, and a few times looked as if it were about to collapse, but it held as he made his way through the attic to the roof.

Next, Nick made his way up the pile. By the time he was done, the zombies had reached them. Jeremy drew his knife and stabbed them, holding them back, while Evan practically charged up the pile, knocking things over and doing considerable damage to it. When Jeremy turned to see what he had done, he sighed. "Come on, Evan!"

Despite the damage, it still looked able to support him. He ran up to it and started to make his way to the top. Only he did this much more slowly than the other three, so as to prevent a collapse. That would mean his death.

When he was near the top, it looked like he was going to make it. But suddenly, the pile shuddered as he brought his foot down on a weak point. The pieces that were holding it together began falling off below him.

Panicking, he tried to scramble the rest of the way up. But just as he closed one hand around the roof the pile fell beneath him. He was just barely able to hold on as all his weight pulled on his arm. The RPG fell out of his hand and landed on the ground.

"Shit!" Nick yelled. "Jeremy!"

Jeremy groaned as he tried to bring his arm up to the roof. Below him, the zombies gathered, driven by the prospect of a free meal. _They're not going to have me,_ he thought with determination.

"Jeremy!" Nick yelled, lowering his hand to him. "Grab on!"

Jeremy struggled to reach up, and finally grabbed Nick's hand. But just as he did, the sky lit up. He was momentarily blinded, and as he squinted, he thought he could hear the whir of helicopters.

_"__Freeze!" _a voice commanded over a loudspeaker. _"Put your hands up, and you'll be allowed to live!"_

On the roof, Alex and Evan put their hands up. Nick swore, and put his free hand up as well. The whirring came closer, and as the source came into sight Jeremy saw that it was indeed helicopters. Three, to be exact. One hovered over the roof, and a rope ladder fell from it. Four armed soldiers climbed down from it and jumped to the roof. They were Pheonix soldiers.

The last one was Lucas.

Noâ€| thought Jeremy. _No, this can't be happening!_

Before either of them could fight, the first two soldiers grabbed both Alex and Evan and handcuffed them. They then produced pieces of cloth and gagged them. A third approached Nick.

"No!" Nick yelled. "Stay away!"

The soldier reached him and wrenched him away from Jeremy's grasp. Jeremy gripped onto the roof and held on for dear life as Nick was cuffed and gagged as well.

Finally, Lucas appeared above him.

"Well, look what we have here," said Lucas. "It looks like these fellas are hungry."

"Noâ€| Please," Jeremy pleaded.

Lucas grinned, and stomped on Jeremy's hand. He yelled in pain, and his reflex caused him to let go of the roof. Lucas lifted his foot and brought it down on the other one, and Jeremy fell.

He landed in the middle of the horde of zombies. They immediately grabbed him began to sink their teeth into his flesh. He was a goner now, and he knew it, but still he fought. He couldn't help himself.

His struggles did nothing but make him more doomed. He was on the floor now, and the zombies continued to eat away at him. Excruciating pain flooded through his body.

He turned to see the RPG right next to him. And then he had an idea.

I can't save myself, he thought. _But I can help save them._

He weakly grabbed the RPG and bashed a zombie out of the way. His vision was going black, and he knew the end was here. With his last breath, he aimed at a helicopter, made sure it wasn't the one his friends were being lifted into, and pulled the trigger.

The helicopter exploded in a cloud of orange fire. Jeremy put the RPG aside, and laid back to admire his work as death took him.

55. Chapter 54: The Crucible of Lyndrich Pt2

****Here's the next chapter guys! Just like I said I would!****

****Next Sunday will not have a new chapter, but this Wednesday will (unless something goes wrong, which shouldn't happen because if I remember correctly the next chapter is fairly short). After that, I _plan_ of having a regular schedule until the final four chapters and epilogue (which... actually isn't that far off).****

****Anyway, enjoy!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifty-Four:

****The Crucible of Lyndrich, Part Two****

****Lyndrich, New Hampshire****

Shade and Ashmore had just returned with Jean and Anthony when they saw the explosion.

"Holy shit!" Kody yelled. "What was that?"

"It came from Evan's neighborhood," Andrew observed.

Sam exchanged a glance with Ashmore, and jumped onto his back. "We're going to check it out," he said.

"Be careful," said Joey.

"I will."

Ashmore spread his wings and took flight. They flew as quickly as they could, and when they reached Evan's house, what they saw filled them with horror. The yard was crawling with zombies, and two helicopters hovered overhead. An insignia of a red phoenix looking into the sky with its wings spread was engraved into the side of each of them. A third helicopter laid in ruin on the ground, flame blossoming from within.

That must have been what caused the explosion, Sam thought. _Oh this is badâ€¦| This is very badâ€¦|_

Suddenly, the helicopter nearest them turned, and Sam saw a large

mounted machine gun in its side. The operator turned it to face them.

"Watch out!" Sam warned. Ashmore ducked out of the way just as a stream of bullets ripped through the air behind them. The dragon twisted and contorted in the air as he dodged the bullets, and went into a dive at the helicopter. But right as he was about to shoot, he saw something that made him pull back up.

"What are you doing?" Sam asked, startled. "Shoot it!"

Ashmore ignored him, and turned back towards where they had come from, just barely dodging another volley of bullets.

When they returned, Ashmore landed among the others. He immediately turned to Reuniclus and said, "Tell him I couldn't destroy that helicopter. Alex was being held prisoner in it."

Reuniclus relayed this to Sam. "Ohâ€¦" he said worriedly. "I seeâ€¦ Sorry."

"What the hell is going on?" asked Anthony.

"They're here," said Sam. "Phoenix."

At the edge of their hearing, they started to hear the choppy whir of one of the helicopters.

"They're coming!" Sam exclaimed. "We have to run!"

"Where?" asked Jean.

Sam thought for a moment. "The border! Waitâ€¦ Noâ€¦ Something doesn't feel rightâ€¦"

"What do you mean?" asked Andrew.

The sound of the helicopter grew louder. "We don't have much time!" Sam exclaimed. "We need to get to my house! We can make a plan there and take a stand if we need to!"

Just then, the helicopter appeared overhead. Almost immediately, bullest sprayed from the turret inside. Without another word, they ran through the tin line of trees that separated the town hall from the church.

Another helicopter met them from that direction. Bullets sprayed, and the group split up as they tried to get away. Half of them were driven into the woods on the other side of the street from the church, and the other half were driven into the forest on the other side of the church field.

Behind them the first helicopter was hovering over the Town Hall. A missile shot from it, and the Town Hall erupted into flames.

_"_They've disappeared into the woods!" _Lucas's voice spoke through the radio in General Maynard's helmet.

"Then go after them!" he replied. "You have the borders blocked off,

right?"

_"__Yesâ€|"_

"So there's no way out for them, right?"

_"__Noâ€|"_

"Then what are you talking to me for?"

_"__I just thought you mightâ€| Ah, fuck it. I'll send Maverick after them."_

Maynard smiled. "Good," he said. He closed the radio link and sat back in his chair.

He was waiting just beyond the Lyndrich border in case the fighting spread there. He had wanted to lead the attack himself but instead he had let Lucas lead. It was a chance for him to redeem himself, and for Maverick to further prove himself as well.

He longed to be in the fight. That was where he was truly happy; on the battlefield. But it was too late for that. He would have to wait until next time.

Andrew, Joey and Anthony ran.

They had run across the church fields until they had reached the woods, and then kept at it. They had no idea where they were going or where everyone else was; only that they had to escape the helicopter.

When they finally stopped running, they all leaned over and panted heavily to regain their breath.

"Fuck," Anthony cursed. "Oh shit!"

"This is bad," said Andrew. "This is really bad!"

"No shit!" said Joey.

Once they had caught their breath, they decided what they should do.

"I say we go to Sam's, like he said," Andrew suggested.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea," Anthony replied.

"Why not?" asked Joey.

"While we were waiting for the dragons to get back with Jean and Andrew, Sam and I were talking. He told me that his house had been overrun. I'm not sure why he said to go back there- maybe the heat of the moment was clouding his judgment- but I don't think it's a good idea."

"All the more reason to go after him," said Andrew. "If what you're saying is true, he might be going to his death."

"There might be little enough so that we can take them all out with

our combined forces," Joey pointed out. "And all that noise we made could have drawn them away."

Andrew sighed as he tried to think. "Long Pond Road is this way," he said. "We can follow that to Sam's house. It will take a while, but we'll get there. We can scope out the situation and decide what to do from there. What do you guys think?"

Joey shrugged. "I can't think of anything better."

"Alright then, let's go," said Andrew.

They continued their trek through the woods, until they finally reached a road. Andrew didn't recognize it, but they followed it until they reached Pine Street. Pine Street connected Main Street and Long Pond Road. It was the obvious way forward.

More than once, they got into fights with zombies wandering along the street. At another point, one of the helicopters flew overhead, and they hid in the woods and held their breath until it passed.

They continued down the road until they finally reached Long Pond Road. They were about to continue, when they heard voices from inside one of the houses. They immediately ducked back into the forest, and watched as a group of several Phoenix soldiers exited through the front door. "Nope!" the first one said. "Nobody in there!"

"Doesn't matter," said another one. "If they're here, we'll find them. And if they try to cross the border, we'll stop them."

"Gotta love technology," a third one said. "Speaking of which—" he turned around and produced from his pocket a gray metal ball. He pressed one side of it, and then threw it into the house. The ball burst outwards, spewing flame everywhere. It flowed like liquid over the outer frame of the house until the entire area surrounding the front door was burning.

As the soldiers left the scene, Andrew could see behind them. Up the street every house was burning. Soldiers were everywhere.

"This is going to be harder than we thought—" said Andrew.

"Did you see where the others went?" asked Alena.

Ben shook his head. "No," he said.

Alena sighed. "Alright," she said. "Do you know where we are?"

"No."

"Damn it."

They had been running for what felt like hours through the woods. They had ran across the street from the church into the yards beyond, and then into the forest. Finally, when they could run no longer without taking a breath, they stopped.

"At least we lost them," said Alena. "I think."

"Let's keep moving," Ben suggested. "Maybe we'll find a road."

They kept walking. Finally after several more minutes, they came to a road.

"I think I know where we are," said Ben. "Yeah, I know this place. And I know where to go from here. Follow me."

They walked down the road, always keeping their guard up, on the watch for any danger. At one point, a helicopter flew overhead, and they were forced to hide in the woods until it passed them by.

Just as they rounded the corner that led to Main Street, they saw a terrifying sight; a squad of soldiers turning in to meet them.

"Run," Ben whispered. They lunged into the trees, praying that the soldiers hadn't seen them. But it was in vain. Behind them, they heard someone shout, "There! In the woods! Get them!"

"Oh shit," said Alena. "Faster!"

They scrambled through the trees as fast as they could. Behind them, the soldiers entered the woods. They could hear their shouts even over the sound of their ragged breath and the crunching of the leaves and snow beneath their feet.

Suddenly, bark burst off of a tree next to them as something deflected off of it. The soldiers were getting closer. Next to him, Alena began to weave her way through the trees. She soon disappeared from sight. Ben followed her.

They wove their way to and fro until they finally broke the soldiers' lines of sight. They crouched behind two large trees and waited.

A few feet away, the soldiers caught up and passed them. They held their breath as they prayed that they wouldn't be found. They were lucky. The soldiers were making so much noise that they couldn't hear anything else. They didn't realize their prey was no longer running. Before long, they had all passed.

Alena let out her breath and was about to stand up, when Ben held her down. "Wait," he whispered.

The running was fadingâ€¦ But another set of footsteps was almost upon them.

"Hey!" a voice called. "Wait up!"

Another soldier ran past then. And just as he did, Ben grabbed a rock and lunged at him. The soldier fell backwards and Ben struggled to wrench off his helmet. The soldier yelled as he tried to fight him off. But it was too little, too late. Ben wrenched off the helmet and brought the rock down on his head.

The man fell limp. Hesitantly, Alena stood up and walked forward. "Is he dead?" she asked.

Ben shook his head. "No," he said. "Just knocked out."

"Ohâ€|"

Ben started to strip the body of weapons. "We needed one of these," he explained, picking up the soldier's gun. He frowned as he found another weapon. He picked it up and examined it. It was a metal ball. A panel on the top could be pressed in. On the side, the letter Z was engraved.

"What's that?" asked Alena.

"I don't know," said Ben. "Some kind of grenade, maybe."

There were five more of them on the soldier's belt. He took them. One more had a Z, two had F's, and the last two had G's.

"Here, take these," he said, handing three of them to Alena. She put them in her jacket pocket, and Ben did the same. Then, he picked up the soldier's side arm- a heavily-powered pistol- and gave it to Alena.

They were surprised suddenly by the sound of footsteps and voices. The soldiers were coming back. Quickly, they ran through the woods in the direction of Main Street. They left the soldiers behind them and reached the road.

"Did we lose them?" asked Lily.

Swampert looked around and said, "I think so. But we need to be careful. You can hide easily, but I can't. If they find us, we'll have to fight."

They had fled the street through the Town Hall's back yard. There, they had dashed through the various abandoned properties beyond until they were certain that they were out of the fire.

"Let's keep moving," he said. Lily nodded, and they continued to make their way through the yards. Finally, when the road started to bend to the right, Swampert spoke again.

"Keep going straight into the forest," he said. "The pond is on the other side."

They ran through the woods. As they were running, Lily started to make conversation.

"Why did Sam say to meet at his house?" she asked. "You saw how many zombies there were!"

"You're forgetting how many we killed," Swampert replied. "We could have killed them all, but we needed to save our energy and ammo."

"Ohâ€|" said Lily. "That makes sense, I suppose."

Finally, they emerged from the woods onto another road. "I know where we are!" Lily exclaimed. "The pond is right down the road from here!"

"Yep," said Swampert.

They reached Pine Street and turned onto it. They walked for a while as they made their way down the road. When they finally reached The pond, they stopped and stared.

The entire street was ablaze. Flames were lapping the sky from every house, and an immensely loud crackling sound filled their ears. To make matters worse, soldiers were patrolling up and down the street.

Swampert quickly ducked into the woods to the left of the road. Lily followed him, and they stayed perfectly still as a group of four soldiers passed them. When they were gone, Swampert let out a breath.

"Okay," he whispered. "Let's slowly cut through the trees on this side. Use the shadows from the fire to stay out of sight."

Lily nodded. "Okay," she said.

They snuck through the trees as quietly as possible. Every time a group of soldiers passed them, they stopped and hid as well as they could. It was hard for Swampert, as his immense size made him much easier to spot. But the light from the fires darkened the shadows even further, and he was able to use it to his advantage.

Mostly.

Eventually, his luck ran out. They were walking slowly through the woods when a group of soldiers walked by. The two Pokémon stopped and crouched to the ground, staying still and holding their breath. They waited for the patrol to pass.

But it didn't. Instead, it stopped as one soldier started talking. Swampert could just barely make out something about having to "take a piss." He started to walk towards them, and Swampert began to panic. Lily could get out of there in a hurry, but he wasn't as fast. He was too big of a target to run, and in the woods he was clumsy. He could only pray that the soldier didn't see him, because if he did, he would have to fight.

The soldier kept walking directly towards them. Swampert's heartbeat quickened with every inch he walked. Finally, he stopped, and stared.

"What the hellâ€|?" he asked. He had seen him. His eyes widened as he realized what he was looking at. "Hey! Over here!"

He raised his gun, and Swampert turned to Lily. "Go," he said. "Now! Run!"

Lily shook her head. "No," she said. "I'm not going to leave you here!"

"You have to!" Swampert exclaimed. "You're fast enough to get away, and you're good in the forest! Besides, I can take them. I'll catch up."

Lily hesitated. "Promise?" she asked.

"Promise."

Lily hesitated for another moment, and then scuttled away. Swampert turned back to the soldiers, who were all together in a group close to the trees. They had their guns raised and were about to fire.

Swampert pounded his foot into the ground and a tremor raced towards them. Two of them lost their balance and fell over, and the other three struggled to keep it. They were momentarily distracted, and Swampert leapt forward. One soldier managed to raise his gun and shoot, but Swampert quickly took him down.

When the soldiers were either dead or unconscious, Swampert looked up from the carnage he had created. A sharp pain flared in his leg, and he looked down to see a dart sticking out. "Ohâ€¦" he thought. "This sucks."

Around him, footsteps appeared. He looked around and saw soldiers coming at him from all sides. Another gun was fired, and another dart stuck into his leg. The tranquilizer was starting to take effect, and his vision was starting to become outlined in black.

"I won't go down without a fight!" He thought. He roared, and reared up in the air, bringing his feet down to the ground as hard as he could. The resulting wave of energy spread through the earth in the form of a wave. The wave crashed into all of his enemies, knocking them over like bowling pins.

He brought his feet down again and opened a large fissure in the earth around him. Those unlucky enough to be close to him fell into it. Part of the burning house next to him collapsed.

Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. He had pushed himself too far, and the fatigue had finally caught up with him. He fell to the ground and his vision went black.

Sam was the first to reach his house.

Upon his arrival, he hid in the woods and knelt over, panting quietly. Next to him, Brian and Elizabeth did the same.

The zombie horde at his house had thinned, that was certain. But there were still a lot of them. They would have to wait for more people to arrive.

Sam had wanted to leave town. In fact, he had been planning on suggesting it, when a thought had occurred to him. The Phoenix army was powerful; if they had to fight them all at once, they would lose. Especially if they had been taken by surprise. So why bother to send the zombies in? He knew that Phoenix had been responsible for that; the circumstances were way too suspicious for them not to be.

Not trusting the situation, he told everyone to meet at his house. Something wasn't quite right, and he wanted to know what before they tried to leave.

As he continued along that train of thought, he realized that the zombies were a diversion. If the Phoenix army had just come in, they would have triggered the alarms, and they would have been able to

slip out through the woods.

But as he thought more about that, it made even less sense. They had triggered an EMP to allow the zombies to slip through; why couldn't they have done so for themselves? Sam could only conclude that something else was going on.

And then they had reached his house, and waited for the others to arrive.

Behind them, a branch cracked in the woods. Sam whipped out his crossbow and whirled around, only to see Ashmore standing there. He sighed in relief and lowered his crossbow. "Don't scare me like that!" he whispered. "I almost killed you!"

Ashmore walked over to him and nudged his cheek. Sam slung his arm around his shoulder and said, "Good to see you too. Are you okay?"

Ashmore nodded.

"I'm fine, thanks for asking," a voice behind them said. Sam looked behind the dragon and saw Jean and Kody approaching them. It was Kody who had spoken.

"How'd you find us?" asked Brian. "I thought we were hidden pretty well."

"From a human? Yeah," said Kody. "Turns out, dragons have good noses."

Jean knelt down next to them and looked out over the yard. "So," he said. "Are you gonna tell us why you made us come here?"

Sam explained everything to them. When he was done, Jean nodded and said, "When you put it like thatâ€¦ I'd have to agree."

A few minutes later, another group arrived at the scene. Samantha, Reuniclus, Gengar and Jack. Then, Shade and Matt arrived. Then Ben and Alena. Each time someone else arrived, Sam had to explain his suspicions all over again. Finally, when Andrew, Anthony and Joey arrived, his suspicions were confirmed.

"They have all the borders guarded," said Joey. "I don't know how, but they do. We won't be able to get out so easily."

"I knew something was up," said Sam. "That's why I said to come here." He sighed and pulled out his crossbow again. "Alright. Let's get 'em."

He stood up and aimed at one of the zombies. He pulled the trigger, and an arrow sailed through the air and into a zombie's head. It fell to the ground with a splash of blood.

"Dude," said Ben. "Awesome."

They charged from the woods, knives in hand, and fought the horde. The Pokemon and dragons went ahead, as they were more powerful, but the humans were right behind them. Using their weapons- natural or unnatural- they hacked, slashed, cut, shot, stabbed, burned, crushed,

and electrocuted the zombies. Finally, the back yard was empty.

"Is everyone okay?" Ben yelled.

Nobody was hurt. They continued into the front yard and picked off all the zombies there. Finally, they were ready to go inside.

Suddenly, they heard a cracking noise from the woods.

Sam raised his crossbow, only to see Lily come running out. She stopped in front of them and panted. "Oh," he said. "It's only you. Thank God you're alive." He frowned, as he realized something had happened. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"It's Swampert," she gasped. "He was spotted by some soldiers. He told me to run, and then he turned to fight them off. I haven't seen him since."

Reuniclus translated this to Sam. "When did this happen?" he demanded. "How many soldiers were there?"

"Four when I left," she said. "It was about an hour ago, down on The pond."

Sam's face became grave. "Oh," he said. "Oh no."

"What?" asked Lily in concern.

"That's down by the border the whole street is being patrolled."

"What? But He can get past them, right? He's strong!"

"I don't know if he's that strong," Sam admitted. He kneeled down and stared at the ground, a grave expression on his face.

"Come on, we need to get inside," said Ben. "There's nothing we can do for him now. We'll just have to wait and see if he makes it."

Sam took a moment to regain his composure. He took a deep breath, probably locking all of his worry away inside his mind, then nodded and stood up. "Okay," he said.

They approached the house and climbed through the broken windows. There were a few zombies inside, but not nearly as many. Once they were killed, the house was clear.

"Alright guys," said Brian. "We need a plan."

"I think if we put all of our strength together, we could make it through the border," said Brian.

"Maybe," said Sam. "I stored our weapons from Boston in the shed. We might be able to use them."

He led them out to the shed, where he opened the door to reveal a pile of guns in the center of the structure. The humans entered and picked out their guns. Once they had all selected a weapon, they gathered back outside.

"So are we gonna do this?" asked Ben.

"I think so," said Sam. "But it's a little more complicated. I'm not leaving until we know what happened to Swampert, which means that we'll have to take someone alive."

"Finding someone shouldn't be a problem," said Joey. "Taking one, howeverâ€¦"

Sam opened his mouth to ask if anyone had any ideas, when in the distance, they heard the whirring of a helicopter. They froze and stared in the direction of the noise, and saw the aerial vehicle emerge from the treeline.

"Get down!" Sam yelled. Everyone dropped to the ground, keeping as still as possible, and hoping to blend in with the zombie carcasses that littered the yard. The helicopter passed over them, but not before shining a spotlight over the yard.

Oh no, Sam thought. _They're gonna see Ashmore and Shade!_

And sure enough, it did. The spotlight rested right on the dragons. They were caught. Sam felt for sure that the shooting would start soon.

Only it didn't. Instead, a soldier leaned out and fired something into the air. A large, red light shot from the gun and flew into the air, signaling anyone who could see it.

Then, the helicopter flew off.

Lucas was startled when he saw the red flare rise into the sky across the town from him.

He pressed a button on his armor to activate communications. "What the hell was that?" he asked.

_"__Sir, we found them!" _the pilot of the other helicopter replied. _"I shot the flare gun to mark their position!"_

Lucas was infuriated. "What?" he asked. "How could you be so stupid? You didn't mark their position; you _scared them off!_ You should have just radioed everyone else!"

_"__I did that too, sir! There are soldiers all over the place over here, including Maverick's small army. They'll be surrounded in no time. There's no escape for them!"_

Lucas's rage was alleviated, but he was still anxious. "Okay," he said. "I'm coming over there. I need to see this thing through."

_"__Alright, sir,"_ said the pilot.

Lucas terminated the link and then leaned forward in his seat. The helicopter had landed to drop off the prisoners at the border with Stevensonville, but he had remained in his seat. Now, they were ready to take off again. He said to the pilot, "Take off. We're going to that flare."

"Oh this is not good," said Anthony. "We're fucked!"

"Calm down!" Ben exclaimed. "We need to think. Can we get out of here in time?"

They heard some shots being fired in the distance, which were followed by more from a completely different direction. They were close.

"No," said Jean. "They're too close and they're closing in."

Sam sighed. "Alright, we'll hole up here. I need some people up in the tree platform to slow them down. Everyone else come inside," he said. Reuniclus, can you put up a force field around the house to deflect bullets?"

Reuniclus nodded. _"Yes," _she said. _"I can do that."_

Kody and Anthony volunteered to climb to the deck. They approached the ladder that led up onto a tree platform, climbed it, and set up on top.

The rest of them moved inside. They moved furniture to block off some the windows on the bottom floor. Then the humans moved upstairs. Matt, Sam, Ben and Alena took one half, while Joey, Brian, Samantha and Jean took the other. The dragons and Pokemon stayed downstairs, waiting for anyone to break in.

The humans positioned themselves at windows and waited. "They'll be here any minute," said Alena. "Be ready."

They waited. Minutes felt like hours. None of them could bear the wait; it was as if there was a fire inside their chests, coupled with the feeling of something moving around. Their anxiety was at a high.

Finally, Matt saw something moving at the edge of his vision. He was looking into the backyard, and he began to see shapes in the trees, as well as moving shadows.

He pulled out his walkie talkie. "Guys, they're here," he said.

_"__Alright, here goes nothing," _said Ben.

Matt gripped his gun and took a deep breath as the first of the soldiers emerged from the trees.

"Hold your fire," Kody whispered. "Wait until they get closer."

The two of them were lying on the platform, staying flat and hidden. They gripped their guns anxiously as the soldiers began to stream from the woods. Finally, when they were right underneath them, Kody said, "Fire."

They pulled the triggers and bullets came streaming out. At first, they merely pinged off of the soldiers' armor. The soldiers in turn faced them and started to fire back.

Finally, Kody breached one soldier's armor and killed him. He ducked back beneath the deck to reload, just as a bullet sailed through the wood where he had just been. He heard someone yelling below them, and momentarily, the bullets stopped. He leaned back over to shoot again, only to come face to face with a large, metal ball flying towards him.

"Grenade!" he yelled. "Get back!"

He and Anthony ran to the ladder of the deck just as the metal ball bounced off of the tree. Kody didn't even bother climbing down; he slid through the opening and fell to the ground. Anthony followed just as the grenade exploded.

Thankfully, it wasn't a proper grenade; it was a flash bang. A blinding white light flashed through the air, and a loud noise pierced their ears. Anthony lost his balance and fell, landing on the ground with a thud. Kody leaned over and helped him up. "Come on!" he yelled. "We have to get to the house!"

They ran into the woods and hid behind a tree. Anthony took out his walkie while Kody leaned out and shot at the soldiers. Those in the house had joined the fight. They were shooting from the upper windows; even Sam and Samantha, who normally hated guns, were forced to use some.

"Cover us!" Anthony exclaimed. "We're making a run for the house!"

_"__Copy that,"_ said Matt. _"Good luck."_

Kody paused to reload, and they waited for the soldiers to switch their fire to the house. Then, they ran for it. He sprinted as fast as he possibly could through the trees. When he exited the forest into the yard, he ran for the front.

At one point, when he turned to see if Anthony was still with him, he witnessed a shot fly directly into his friends back. _No! _he thought. But fortunately, he survived. He yelled in pain and stumbled forward, but he kept going.

They reached the front yard and exited the line of fire. There were no enemies here yet, but Kody knew there would be. To confirm his prediction, he glanced up the street, and saw the shadows of soldiers walking towards them.

He turned to Anthony. "We have to get inside!" he exclaimed.

Anthony nodded weakly. They ran to the door and knocked as hard as they could. A loud grating noise could be heard from beyond the door, and then, it opened.

Beyond the door was Reuniclus, greeting them. Kody walked in and Anthony stumbled in behind him. The wounded teen took one look around the room and collapsed to the floor.

"Anthony!" Kody exclaimed. He ran over to his fallen friend and found him unresponsive. Panicking, he felt for a pulse, and to his relief, found one. "He's just unconscious," he declared.

He looked up to see the door still open. "Shut that!" he exclaimed. "There are soldiers coming that way!"

Reuniclus shut the door, locked it, and moved a couch in front of it. Kody went back to examining Anthony's body and found a small dart in his back. "Tranquilizer," he said. "They aren't shooting to killâ€¦ They're trying to capture us!"

He stood up and turned to Reuniclus. "Take care of him," he said. "I need to tell the others."

Ben was in the room next to Sam's bedroom shooting out of the window. They had killed some of the soldiers, but the onslaught kept coming. He wasn't sure how much longer they'd be able to hold them off.

He heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs and turned to see Kody enter the room. "You're alive!" he said. "Good. Where's Anthony?"

"He was hit," said Kody. "Don't worry, he's alive. Unconscious, but alive."

Ben nodded. "That's good," he said. He took a shot out the window and hit a soldier. Matt, who was next to him, turned from the window. "Go to the other side," he said. "They could use you."

"Okay," said Kody. "But there's something you should know." He told them what he knew. When he was done, they looked grave.

"This is badâ€¦" said Matt.

"No shit," said Ben. "Not only are we being flanked, but the helicopters aren't far behind."

"Wait, what?" asked Kody. "How do you know?"

"I saw them off in the distance," said Ben. "At least, I think it's them. Something was flying in the sky, and I'm pretty sure the dragons are downstairs." He stood up. "Alena!" he yelled. "Sam! One of you come over here!"

Sam appeared in the room, and Ben explained the situation to him. "Matt and Kody are going downstairs to fight off the newcomers," he said. "We need one more person."

"Wait, what now?" asked Matt. "I don't remember agreeing to this!"

"And I don't remember wanting to get in a gunfight with the most powerful army left on Earth, but guess what? It happened! Get going."

The three of them went downstairs, while Ben took over the window and kept shooting. Many had fallen, but even more remained. Reuniclus's barrier was keeping the bullets away, but he had no idea how strong she was, or how long it would last.

Finally, his gun clicked. He was out of ammo. He scanned the backyard, and saw that the soldiers had made ground. They were almost upon them. He had to keep shooting. He reached for another clip, and

found nothing. He was all out.

Shit, he thought. _Now what?_

He had an idea. He stood up and yelled, "Alena! Hold on! I'll be right back!"

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Downstairs!"

"Why?"

"No more questions!" he yelled. He ran downstairs and found Sam, who was shooting out the front window. "How goes the fight?" he asked.

"Alright," said Sam. "So long as Reuniclus's barrier holds."

Ben nodded, and then asked what was on his mind. "Where's your crossbow?" he asked.

"On the table," said Sam. "Whyâ€|?"

"And do you have any tape?"

"Yeah, whyâ€|?"

"Show me."

"What-"

"Just show me!"

Sam stood up and led Ben to a drawer where supplies were kept. He produced a roll of masking tape and handed it to him. "What are you planning on doing with it?" he asked.

"Oh, wonderful things," said Ben. "Wonderful things indeed."

He took the crossbow and returned to his perch upstairs. Immediately, he set to work creating his weapon. He took an arrow and pulled out one of his grenades. He saw that it had the letter F engraved on it. He aligned the button with the point and touched the two, but not so much as to press it. He then taped them together, using so much tape that the ball couldn't even move, so as to avoid the arrow pressing the button midair. When he was done, he put the bow into the crossbow.

He looked outside to see where he could fire it. Several enemies had made their way onto the platform. _As good a place as any,_ he thought. _Sorry Sam_.

He aimed the crossbow and fingered the trigger. _Let's hope this works,_ he thought as he pulled the trigger

The arrow sailed out the window and flew towards the observation deck. Ben held his breath to see if the tape would hold. It did. The arrow flew right into the tree sticking up from the center of the platform. The grenade hit the tree and stopped, but the arrow kept

going, right into the button. It pressed inward, and the ball burst out in a cloud of flame. The fire was almost liquid, and it flowed across the deck, alighting everything in its path. The soldiers jumped off the platform as the fires engulfed it.

_"__What the fuck was that?" _Joey yelled over the walkie.

Ben picked up his walkie and laughed into it. "Oh yeah!" he yelled.

"Ben, was that you?" asked Alena from the other room.

"Hell yeah it was!"

He pulled out another grenade- this one with the letter g engraved on it- and taped it to another arrow. He nocked the arrow and aimed for the tree stump beneath the now-burning platform. He fired.

The arrow sailed through the air and hit the ground just beneath the tree. But nothing happened. Ben was about to dismiss it as a dud when a massive explosion ripped through the tree. A crater was blown into the side, leaving it unbalanced. The weight of the platform brought it down. It cracked as it fell into the onslaught, crushing some soldiers, and creating a blockade for others.

_"__Oh my God, what is going on?" _asked Brian.

"Magic," said Ben.

_"__Holy crap, Ben, what did you do?" _asked Sam. _"You owe me a _lot of money for that!"_

"Shit!" Alena yelled next to him. "I'm out of ammo!"

_"__Out of ammo,"_ Samantha's voice echoed over the walkie.

_"__I'm getting close," _said Joey.

_"__Me too," _said Sam.

Uh-oh, Ben thought. _This is bad._ Suddenly, a thumping noise came from below him. Ben looked out the window and saw that the soldiers had reached the door, and were trying to force their way in.

He picked up his walkie. "Everyone, downstairs!" he yelled. "They're getting in!"

_"__Mother of dick!" _Joey yelled.

"How's the fight going out front, Sam?"

_"__We've almost got all of them! We just need a little more time!"_

Ben cursed, then said, "Okay. We'll have to buy you some, then!"

He stood up and ran downstairs, with Alena close behind him. Everyone else, including Joey, Brian, Jean and Samantha, were gathered there. Ben looked, and saw that the soldiers had broken the slider door.

"Reuniclus!" he yelled. "How are they getting in if you have a barrier up?"

"I'm not God, you know," she said. _"My powers are strong enough to build a barrier around the house, but I can only deflect small things like bullets when I make one that big. People are a completely different matter."_

One of the soldiers lifted their gun and shot at them. The bullets immediately deflected off of Reuniclus's barrier and flew backward, hitting him in the face.

"If you shift all of your energy to that spot, can you hold them out?" Ben asked.

"Yes, but it would leave the front defenseless."

"We can handle it!" Sam yelled. "Just do it!"

Reuniclus diverted her energy to the back porch, and the soldiers went sliding back. They toppled over, and as they stood up and tried to get back to where they had been, they met with an impossible resistance.

The rest of the group joined Sam and Kody at the windows. Before too long, the rest of the squad in front of the house had been either killed or driven off.

"How are we doing on ammo?" Kody asked.

"Bad," said Joey. Everyone else agreed. Those who weren't out of ammo were getting close to it.

Brian stood up and went to the back window. He peered out through a crack in the fortifications and turned back. "There's so many of them," he said. "We can't hold them off. We have to retreat!"

"We have to retreat!"

As Reuniclus heard the desperate announcement, her mind immediately tried to work to find some sort of solution.

"I can push them all back," she suggested. _"It could buy us some time. Then we could escape."_

"I like that idea," said Joey. "I really do."

Reuniclus closed her eyes and focused. She felt her energy strengthen, and then shoved outward with it, sending any soldier close enough flying backwards. _"It's done,"_ she said. _"Let's go"_

"Wait," said Sam. "Do you guys hear that sound?"

"What?" asked Ben. They all fell silent as they listened, and heard it.

A helicopter.

"Oh shit," said Ben, right as the ceiling exploded. The roof collapsed from a shot from the helicopter. Flames blossomed inwards, as everyone ducked for cover. When the explosion cleared, rubble rained down on them.

"Run!" Jean yelled. They started to push the blockage from the front door and opened it. Kody picked up Anthony's body on the way out.

Gengar materialized next to Reuniclus. "You won't be able to escape," he said. "Not now. Not unless we create a distraction."

Reuniclus knew what he meant. "No," she said. "I won't let you stay here alone."

Suddenly, Jack materialized next to her. _"He won't be alone,"_ she heard her think. _"I'll stay with him."_

Reuniclus was speechless. "Butâ€¦| Do you realize how dangerous this is?"

_ "__I think we can do it," _said Jack. _"Trust me, Reuniclus, please."_

"We'll meet in Manchester at the entrance to Aperture," said Gengar.

Reuniclus nodded. "Okay," she gave in. "Be careful."

Gengar nodded and disappeared. Reuniclus followed the others.

They were all outside now, running down the street. Behind them, the helicopter suddenly gave a jerk, and crashed into a tree. A giant cloud of fire erupted into the sky, and white hot chunks of metal rained to the ground.

What theâ€¦|? thought Elizabeth.

"What's going on?" Ben yelled.

_ "__That must have been Gengar and Jack,"_ said Reuniclus. _"They stayed behind."_

"What?" Sam yelled. "Why didn't you stop them?"

_ "__Because we had no other choice."_

Suddenly, before any of them could react, another helicopter appeared in front of them. It immediately started firing. Before they had a chance to duck into the woods, Matt, Ben, Brian, Joey, Kody, Jean, and Lily were all hit. Shade roared, and shot a fire ball, but it missed, and then they shot him too. Ashmore and Reuniclus both were struck. Andrew tried to run, but they hit him too.

Elizabeth had to think fast. The stream of bullets was approaching Alena, who was right next to her. The Scrafty darted forward, grabbed the back of the human's shirt, and pulled her into the woods.

Everyone else followed. Those that had been hit stumbled, but were

able to run. They quickly lost the helicopter in the trees, but they kept running.

And then something else happened. One by one, those that had been shot fell to the ground. Alena saw Ben fall, and turned around to help him. "Ben!" she yelled. _"Ben!"_

Elizabeth grabbed her and kept running. _I'm sorry,_ she thought. _We can't carry them all. We'll find a way to get them back._ She wished she could say it to her.

They kept running until finally, the danger was gone. Elizabeth stopped, and Alena sank to her knees, gasping. "They killed him!" she exclaimed. "They killed Ben!"

Elizabeth shook her head. _Nope. Only tranquilized. He's being taken alive. _She had seen the darts in the bodies.

Samantha was still with them, and nearby. "Alena!" she yelled. "Are you okay?"

Alena shook her head. "No," she said. "Samantha, they're all dead."

"No they aren't," said another voice. Elizabeth looked over to see Sam and sighed in relief. "They were tranquilized."

"So they're alive?" asked Alena.

"I think so," said Sam. "In the hands of those people, they might be better off dead. But I don't think they are just yet."

Samantha helped her to her feet. "Let's go," she said. "We need to figure out a way to get them out, and then escape this town."

Sam looked around. "Did anyone else make it?" he asked.

Elizabeth looked around as well. They were alone.

"As far as I can see, no," said Samantha.

Sam sighed. "Damn it," he said. He gathered up his composure, and then turned. "Come on," he said.

"We have to go after them," said Lucas as he stood amongst the strewn bodies on the forest floor.

"Sir, is that really necessary?" an officer asked. "Look how many prisoners we have here. Let's bomb the town and get out."

"We don't have Sam," said Lucas. "Our orders were to take Sam alive. He's not here."

"Maybe he's around here somewhere."

Lucas shook his head. "I don't think so," he said. He turned around. "Get ready, everyone! They're going through the woods! So we're gonna meet them on the other side!"

They had been walking for a long time. Now, finally, the first light

of morning was creeping into the sky. They had survived the night. But whether or not they would survive the day was another question entirely.

It had started to rain. The trees offered some protection, but the water still coated their bodies as they walked. They spoke little to each other.

When they finally emerged onto a road, Sam looked around and recognized it. "This is Gunnerville Road," he said. "We have a straight shot to Gunnerville from here. Come on, we're almost there!"

"How are we going to get past the border?" asked Alena.

"You're not," a voice behind them said.

A chill went up Sam's spine, and he turned around to come face to face with Lucas. The man stepped out from behind a tree, and several soldiers with him. They had been hiding in wait for them.

"We've lost,"_ thought Sam. He put down his gun and held his hands into the air. Samantha, Alena and Elizabeth did the same.

"What did you do to them?" asked Samantha.

"Don't worry, your friends are alive," said Lucas. "Well, most of them. Men, take them away."

"Most of them,"_ thought Sam. Around him, soldiers approached them and grabbed their hands, twisting them behind their backs. "What have you done, Lucas?" he yelled. "What have you done?"

Lucas only laughed as a hand covered Sam's mouth with a cloth covered in a strange-smelling liquid. A few whiffs of it were enough to knock him out.

Several hours later, when all of the prisoners had been taken and the border fortifications removed, Lucas watched the town shrink as he flew away on his helicopter.

When they were out of range, he patched a call through his radio set to the base. Giovanni answered.

"__I trust you have good news?"_ he asked.

Lucas smiled. "The mission was a success," he said. "Send the missile."

Giovanni laughed. "Good," he said. "Doing that right now."

Farther north, in the white mountains, everything seemed quiet and peaceful. But that illusion was broken, as a deafening rumble cut through the crisp morning air. A large projectile flew from the ground, leaving a trail of smoke and pollution behind it.

The missile flew through the air at a blindingly fast speed. It reached its destination in a matter of minutes. When it did, the entire town was engulfed and vaporized by a cloud of fire.

Just like that, Lyndrich was gone.

56. Chapter Fifty-Five: The White Prison

****Alright, here's the next chapter! As I said before, it's a little short. Also, I won't be updating again for another week or so. Until then, however, enjoy what I already have up!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifty-Five:

****The White Prison****

****Location unknown****

The man looked around at his prison in confusion. _Where am I? _he thought. The room he was in was pure white. He was naked, and sitting in a chair. A lone door stood on the other side of the room. He stood up and walked over to it, only to find it locked.

Confused, he sat back in his chair and tried to remember what had happened. The last coherent memory he had was being attacked in the forest just outside Lyndrich. His squad had been evacuated the small town when they had been jumped. He never saw his attacker; he was hit in the back of the head and knocked out.

He felt the back of his head, beneath the short black hair, and felt nothing. He frowned. _That's strange..._ he thought. _You'd think there'd be a bump or something._

The door opened. He stood up as a familiar-looking man entered the room. He was an elderly white man with trimmed grey hair. A pair of glasses sat on his nose, with one lens blacked out. His one blue eye was looking at him.

He recognized this man. "Dr. Corvus," he greeted.

"Captain Davison," Dr. Corvus acknowledged. "How do you feel?"

"Confused," Davison repeated. "What's going on? Where am I? Why don't I have any clothes?"

Corvus frowned. "What are you talking about? You're wearing clothes."

Davison looked down, and was startled when he saw that he was now covered in white robes. The white stood out as a stark contrast to his brown skin. "What theâ€¦?"

"Something wrong?"

"I could have sworn I wasâ€¦| Never mind." He must have been seeing things. Maybe they had given him something. "What's going on?"

Dr. Corvus entered the room and pulled up a chair. Davison blinked in

confusion. That chair hadn't been there before. Or had itâ€|?

"Please, sit down," said Corvus.

Davison hesitantly did as he was told. Corvus clasped his hands together and asked, "What's the last thing you remember, Davison?"

"Iâ€| We were attacked," Davison replied.

"By who?"

"I don't knowâ€| I didn't see."

Corvus sighed. "We took out Lyndrich, and captured our enemies there," he said. "But it seems that there are some new players. Someone wasn't happy with us, and that someone intervened."

"That's who attacked me?" asked Davison.

Corvus nodded.

"Who were they? I'll kick their asses."

"We don't know," Corvus admitted. "But we think you can help us."

"How?" asked Davison.

Corvus ignored his question. "Truth is, we've been getting messages from them for a while. They've been playing with us. Leaving clues here and there, but never letting us figure anything out. We've wanted to go after them, but we can't. And now, the game's gotten deadlier.

"They've kidnapped some officers and hidden them in an undisclosed location. They say they're going to die unless we find them in a week. They've left a trail of breadcrumbs, starting with you."

"Me?"

"Yes. They've left a key with you, you see."

"A keyâ€|?"

"Yes. A key."

Davison frowned, and checked his pockets. Nothing was there. "I don't have any key," he said.

Corvus sighed. "That's a shame," he said. He stood up. "I'll be back soon. Maybe you'll have it then."

"Wait, what?"

Corvus was already at the door. "Goodbye, Captain," he said as he shut the door.

"Wait!" Davison yelled. But it was too late. Corvus was gone.

Gengar was sitting on the ground, thinking. Jack was outside, patrolling the perimeter of the house they had found, keeping watch for any enemies.

After the rest of the group had fled, they held off the Phoenix men as long as they could. Their resistance had ended when the army fell back. At first, they'd thought they'd won, but when they tried to follow, they witnessed the unconscious bodies of Sam, Alena, Samantha and Elizabeth being carried away.

Now, they were sheltering themselves in Norbury, trying to figure out what to do next.

Some time later, Jack returned from her watch to check on him. A wave of friendly curiosity emanated from her.

"I'm alright," said Gengar. "How are you?"

Judging from the feeling radiating off of her, he figured she was okay. "I've been trying to find information," he said. "But it's harder than I thought."

Confusion radiated from Jack, and he turned to look at the body next to him. "Most people's memories are unprotected," he explained. "I can just hop in and read their thoughts. But Captain Davison here is different. He has some sort of wall between his conscious mind and his memories. I don't know how or why. I have him in a sort of lockdown, and I've been trying ways to unlock his memories. But so far, nothing's working."

Jack encouraged him.

"Thanks," he said. "You too."

The Chandelure went back to her patrol, and Gengar looked at the unconscious body of Davison. He decided to try a different approach.

Let's speed things up a bitâ€|

Captain Davison looked up as the door opened again. Dr. Corvus once again stepped through the door.

"I don't suppose you've found that key yet?" he asked.

Davison shook his head. "No," he said.

Corvus sighed and sat down. "Okay," he said. "I'm going to try another tactic. The truth is, none of this is real. You're dreaming."

Davison was struck with confusion. _What? _ He wondered. _How?_ "I'mâ€| dreaming?"

"Yes," said Corvus. "I'm not really Corvus. I just disguised myself as him to get you to trust me. But the truth is, I'm not even human."

Davison got to his feet and back away from him. "You're lying," he said. "What do you want from me?"

"The key," Corvus replied.

"_I don't have any damn key!" _Davison yelled.

"But you do," said Corvus. He raised a hand and poked his head. "In here."

"Whatâ€|?"

Corvus stood up. "You see," he said. "This is a prison I built for you, to keep you out of my way while I search your mind. But a small problem arose." He stopped for a moment, and then beckoned to him. "Come with me," he said.

Davison followed him hesitantly as he led him out of the cell into a white hall. Several white doors led off of it, and at each end was a grey, steel door.

Corvus pointed to their right. "That door there," he said. "That leads out." He turned to the other one. "That one leads further in. That's the one I need. That's where all of the vital information stuck in your head is. But the problem is: it's locked. It appears that I can't open it without the key, which only you can give me."

Davison retreated back into the room and stared at him. "This isn't real," he said. "Either you're making this up, or it's all in my head."

"_Of course_ it's in your head, smart one," said Corvus. "It's still as real as you don't want it to be."

"Prove it."

"This is your dream," said Corvus. "I've taken control of it, which is the only reason you can't do anything. But if I were to give you a little bit more control, you might be able to, say, levitate, or grow another set of arms, or turn into a bear and try to eat me- you'll fail, but it will prove what I've been saying. Some of it, anyways." He brought his fingers together and snapped them. As he did, his eyes flashed scarlet red. Davison recoiled in fright.

"Don't worry, I don't bite," said the thing. "Well, I won't bite you, anyway."

Davison closed his eyes, and tried to will himself off of the ground. When it didn't appear to be working, he opened his eyes and mouth to say so, but then stopped.

He was floating a foot off of the ground.

Corvus snapped again, a smug smile on his lips. Davison dropped to the ground, lost his balance, and fell forward. His arms caught him, and he pushed himself back to his feet.

"So anyway," said the thing that was pretending to be Corvus. "About that key."

"What do you need it for?" Davison demanded.

"That's my business, and mine alone," said the thing.

"You're digging through my mind," Davison explained. "It is my business."

The thing laughed. "I'm the one in charge here," it said. "With a snap of my fingers I could subject you to horrors beyond the any you could possibly imagine. Do you really want that?"

Davison just stared at it. The thing grinned, then said, "Fine. I have someâ€¦| _colleagues_ that are in trouble. You possess information that can help me help them. If you give me the key now, I promise I won't do any unnecessary digging, and I'll release you from this prison."

But I don't have any key, Davison thought. He opened his mouth to say so, when a thought occurred to him.

"You're with that group from Lyndrich, aren't you?" he asked. "You're one of their monsters."

The Thing cringed. "I don't like that word," it said. "I really don't. But yes, you've caught me. It doesn't change anything though."

"Yes, it does," Davison insisted. "There's no way in hell I'm helping you."

The Thing frowned. "That's a shame, then," it said. "I'll leave you in here for a bit to think. I hope you change your mind. If you don't, wellâ€¦| You'll be sorry."

"I won't," Davison warned. "That's a promise."

The thing glared at him for a little longer, and then left the room, sealing him inside.

Gengar reformed outside the body and immediately went to find Jack.

It was dark. He had spent the whole day inside the human's body. He found Jack, and said, "I'm taking a break. Go inside and get some rest; I'll take it from here."

For a few hours he glided around the house, keeping watch for any enemies. Finally, he reached a point of exhaustion so great that he could barely keep his eyes open. He needed some rest.

He returned to the room he had stashed the body in. They had set up a base there, and that was where Jack had fallen asleep. He gently woke her and said, "I need some sleep. Can you take the next watch for me?"

Jack nodded and left the room. Gengar turned himself invisible to all but her, levitated into the air, and fell asleep.

Jack woke him up what felt like a minute later. The pale light of

dawn was beginning to creep into the house through the windows. "You tired?" he asked. Jack nodded. "Okay. I'll take the next watch."

Jack took his spot, and Gengar floated outside and watched for another few hours. After a while, he decided it was time to get back to his interrogations.

He went back inside and woke Jack. She went to take the watch, and Gengar turned his gaze to the body.

Alright, he thought. _It's time._

Davison looked up as the door opened once again. He stood up and stepped back, holding up his fists in protection.

The Thing walked through the door, a smug smile spread across its face. Davison braced himself, and said, "Let me out of here, or I'll make you sorry."

The Thing stared at him and then burst out laughing. "That's good," he said. "That's funny." He composed himself and then said, "But really, do you honestly believe you can fight me? I have control here, not you."

Davison gritted his teeth, and ran forward, swinging a fist. The Thing laughed, and held out a hand. The man instantly froze in the air. He tried to move, but he couldn't budge.

"Let's cut the shit," said the Thing. "Give me that key right now, or else."

"Or else what?" asked Davison. "You'll kill me? It doesn't matter. I'm not afraid to die."

The Thing chuckled. "Now what good would that do me?" it asked. "No, I'm not going to kill you. I'm going to make you beg for death, but I won't kill you."

"It doesn't matter. I don't have any key."

"But you will," said the Thing. "When you've made up your mind to give it to me, it'll appear to you. And then I'll go my own way, and you'll never have to face me again."

Davison spat. "I'll never give it to you."

The Thing smiled. "So be it," he said. He raised his hand, and Davison flew off of his feet into the chair. Buckles appeared out of nowhere and strapped him in. He struggled, but it was no use.

The Thing smiled. "If you want me to stop, all you have to do is give in."

"Never!"

The Thing grinned smugly, and snapped his fingers. Immediately, Davison's view went black.

Gengar watched on as the man jerked and thrashed in his

constraints.

Honestly, not even he could imagine what the man was going through. He was exposing him to nightmarish images, and was too preoccupied holding the walls of his sanity up to pay attention to what he was showing.

The room around him shook and trembled as the man's sanity threatened to collapse. Gengar concentrated all of his will on keeping it up.

But after a while, he started to fail. Dust was falling from the ceiling, and soon after small chunks of metal. It was all Gengar could do to hold on.

Finally, as it seemed his plan would fail, Davison yelled, "No! Stop! Please! I'll give you the key!"

Gengar released the man from his visions and the foundations of his mind immediately stopped shaking. Some damage had been done; there was no doubt about that. But it was no longer in danger of immediate collapse.

"I'll give you the key," Davison pleaded. "Just tell me how."

Gengar smiled. "Good boy," he said. "Check your pocket."

Davison slid a hand into his pocket and stared in confusion as he pulled out a small, golden key.

Gengar smiled, stepped forward, and swiped it out of his hand. "Thank you," he said. He turned to leave.

"Wait," said Davison. "You said you were going to let me go."

Gengar turned. "Yes," he said. "I did. But I need you to stay in here while I find the information I'm looking for."

He left the room before Davison could respond. Shutting the door behind him he made his way to the locked door. He inserted the key into the locked and turned it.

It opened.

Gengar entered the room full of memories and information. There was so much of it; he couldn't hope to sort through it all. But he knew where to look first.

He found the place containing the most recent memories and sorted through it. Many of the memories were of Boston, he observed. Others were about training. But nothing he really had any use for.

While he was looking, he noticed something. There was another door in the far corner of Davison's mind. Curiously, he approached it and opened it.

The first thing he saw was a child that looked like a younger version of Davison. The child was in tears, and from a location he couldn't see he heard yelling. Then, there was a gunshot.

He closed the door quickly. _Childhood trauma,_ he thought. _I should have known. That would be powerful enough to create a lock like this._

He continued his search. Finally, he found an image of a shack. A secret door was opened in the floor, leading to the Phoenix base. Gengar rewound the memory to get a better glimpse at where the shack was located. _I've found it,_ he thought. _Now to see if my friends were taken there._

He continued to rummage through the memories until he finally found it. The mission briefing. General Maynard had stood in front of the remainder of the population of Boston and gave them the orders. They were to go into Lyndrich, capture the inhabitants, and burn the city.

Then, they were to take them back to the base.

Gengar sighed in relief. He had found it. Now he could wipe Philip's memory and leave.

He was about to turn to do so, when another memory caught his eye. From what he saw at a glance, it involved Elizabeth.

He investigated out of curiosity. The memory played before his eyes. Davison was hiding behind a tree, when those who had escaped the attack at the house emerged from the woods. Sam, Samantha, Alena, and Elizabeth. He watched with horror as the soldiers exited their hiding places. Lucas was leading them. The man gave an order, and the soldiers rushed to Gengar's friends, restraining them.

Finally, the ghost watched as Davison held a rag to Elizabeth's mouth.

An almost uncontrollable rage filled him. The next part of the memory showed Davison roughly dragging Elizabeth's body like it was nothing but a sack. Finally, he brought her to a ladder, where she was carried by others into a helicopter. Then, the memory was over.

Shaking with rage, Gengar came to a decision. What he had planned for Davison was too good for him. He deserved to die.

He slowly walked out of the room and slammed the door behind him. He walked down the hallway, all the while hearing Davison yell at him from his prison. He ignored the man, knowing he would soon be silenced.

He finally reached the door on the opposite side of the hallway and opened it.

Gengar was back in control of Davison's body. He left the vessel, and reformed on the outside. Then, he waited for Jack to return.

When the Chandelure finally arrived, he turned to her. "I found out what I needed," he said.

Jack smiled. A desire to leave filled the air around her.

"Soon," said Gengar. "But there's something that needs to be done

first." He turned to look at Davison. "This is the one that took Elizabeth," he said. "Nobody is allowed to mess with her but me." He turned back to Jack. "You hungry?" he asked.

Jack hesitated, and Gengar could feel her objections. "Think about it," he said. "Remember who these people are."

The hesitation stopped, and Jack squinted her eyes shut. Then, she nodded. The Chandelure slowly approached his body, flaming "arms" outstretched.

57. Chapter Fifty-Six: Blood of a Dragon

****Alright guys, I'm back! I had a great but busy weekend, and now I'm here with another chapter.****

****There are only five chapters left, including this one, until the big, four-part finale. Once I get through those five chapters, well... I'll get back to you on that. I will be taking a bit of a hiatus so I can get them ready, though.****

****Anyway, here's this chapter. Warning: contains quite a bit of pseudo-science towards the end. Anyway, I hope you like it!****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

* * *

<p>Chapter Fifty-Six:

****Blood of a Dragon****

****Location unknown****

Ben woke up strapped into a chair.

"Whaâ€|?" he groaned. His head was resting on his shoulder, and he lifted it up and looked around to find himself in a brightly lit room filled with Phoenix soldiers. His reflexes made him immediately bolt up, but his restraints held him down.

He looked around and saw that his friends were with him, but they were restrained as well. Even the PokÃ©mon and dragons were with them; although they were strapped down into a wheeled platform with curved iron bars and straps holding them in.

"Hey, this one's awake," a voice said.

"Go fetch the Doc," said another.

Ben watched as two guards hurried out of the room, and then looked to the one who had given the order. "Where am I?" he demanded. "What have you done?"

The guard ignored him. If Ben hadn't known better, he would have thought he was ignorant to his presence.

Around him, some of his other friends were waking up as well. He

heard their voices, asking where they were, what had happened, and other questions of the like. One of the dragons growled.

By the time the guards returned, they were almost all awake.

They burst through the thick steel doors that led into the room and quickly stood off to the side, making way for another. The man entered the room, and Ben's first thought was that he was dressed oddly formally. He was dressed in a white lab coat, with a white shirt and blue tie underneath and black pants. He seemed to be in his late middle-ages, as his short, neatly kept hair and stubble was pure grey. His one white eye seemed to smile sadistically at them. A pair of glasses was perched on his nose, with one lens blacked out.

Upon his arrival, the dragons, one on either side of the room, spat and snarled. He saw Ashmore, who was closer to him, pull back in his restraints, trying even harder to escape them. And with that in mind, he knew who he was looking at.

"Well, well, well," said Corvus. He started to pace in front of them. "We finally meet. I've heard a lot about you."

"Likewise," said Ben. "Doctor."

"I wish I could be talking to all of you right now," said Corvus. "But from what I understand, there was an accident."

"That was no fucking accident," Ben heard Alex say. "Your men killed Jeremy in cold blood."

The words tore at Ben's heart. _Jeremy_ he thought. _Oh no, not you too_

"It doesn't matter," said Corvus. "What's done is done. You're here now and that's what matters."

He stopped as he reached Shade. With a look over the dragon, he said, "From that scar on your wing, I assume you must be Shade. Lucas told me some interesting things about you."

Shade growled viciously in response. Ben saw Corvus nod at the nearest guard. The soldier stepped forward, produced a combat knife, grabbed the dragon's head and held it up to his eye.

"You're going to pay for what you did to me," said Corvus. "You think it's okay to just take people's eyes? If that's how you think, I'll just have to return the favor." He nodded at the guard. "Do it."

The guard raised his knife and plunged it down.

Suddenly, a cry rang out. "NO!" It was Matt.

Corvus raised his hand, and the guard stopped. Corvus looked at Matt, and said, "You really care about this animal, don't you?" he asked.

"Don't you fucking touch him," said Matt. "I'll kill you."

Corvus laughed. "Oh you will, will you?" he asked. "I'd like to see you try."

With one movement, he swept the knife from the guard's hand and cut Shade's side. The dragon roared in pain, and Corvus handed the knife back, now dripping with dragon's blood.

"You mother fucker!" Matt screamed, lunging forward.

"What I don't understand is why you put so much love into what we could pass off as a consumer product," said Corvus. "This creature is the equivalent to factory-made plastic. Some might not even call it a real creature; more of an abomination. It wasn't born; it was made. It was a science experiment." He looked down cruelly at Shade. "And no matter how smart you are, nothing will change that."

Shade must have reacted to that, because he added, "What, did you think you were anything else? Did you think you were _special_? Just because you were the second generation doesn't mean you were anything different. We just improved the design somewhat, that's all. You're still lab trash."

Corvus turned to look at Ashmore, down the hall. "And you're no different!" he yelled.

He then saw Matt and Sam. "Ohâ€¦ you guys _knew,_ didn't you? And you never told them?" He _tsk_ed. "Bad move."

He stood up. "Enough of this. I have better things to do. I came to make you an offer. Anyone who joins me will be spared. Anyone who doesn't, wellâ€¦ Let's just say it'll be bad for you. So, who wants in?"

Nobody said anything.

"Really? Are you sure?"

Ben replied by spitting out at him.

Corvus sighed. "Someone hit him," he said. "And then take them to the prisons. I'm going back to work."

The last thing Ben felt was a huge blow to the back of his head.

Nick tried to fight his captors, but they were too strong.

They pulled him out of his chair and yanked him into the hallway, blindfolding him as he went. He struggled and swore, but they held him. After a while, they struck him as hard as they could, and he submitted.

They finally reached a cell, removed his blindfold, and threw him in. They locked it behind him and left.

He stood up and looked behind him. He was in a dimly lit room made of grey metal. He was surprised to see that the fourth wall was made of a glass-like substance. He waited for the guards to leave, and then punched at it, hoping to break it.

It didn't even budge. All he managed to do was bruise his knuckles. "Fuck," he cursed under his breath as he tried to shake the pain

off.

Across the hall from him was another cell. He saw that Samantha was in it. Pressing himself against the wall, he called out to her, hoping she could hear. "Samantha!"

"Nick?" she said. Nick was shocked; he could hear her voice like they were in the same room. The effect was disorienting. "How can I hear you this well?"

Nick shook his head. "How am I supposed to know?" He pressed his head against the transparent wall and tilted it to the side, trying to see who was next to Samantha. To her right were Sam and Andrew, and to her left were Alex and Evan.

"Well," he said. "This is really shitty."

"Yeah," said Sam. "No crap."

"How are we going to get out of this one?" asked Alex.

"I have no idea," said a voice from the cell to Nick's right. He recognized it as Ben's. "There must be some way, thoughâ€|"

Five days passed. For the next few hours, they talked like this. Nothing else happened. They talked with whoever they could talk with. At first, they tried to plan an escape, but as it turned out, a guard was within hearing distance. They were each beaten. They learned to hold their tongue after that.

They were brought food every once in a while in the form of old, stale bread and hard cheese. They spent most of the time worrying, be it about themselves, the ghosts that had been left behind, or each other. They also mourned for Jeremy. Other times they played games, such as twenty questions, to pass the time. Some of the more adventurous members of the group, such as Ben and Alex, decided to see how much they could insult the guards without receiving a blow.

The worst part of it was the not knowing. They spent hours not knowing anything about what was going to happen. They didn't know where Gengar or Jack were, or if they were even alive. For Matt and Sam it was even worse, as they had no idea if their dragons were okay, and no way of talking to them.

The dragons were doing terribly as well. Although they couldn't see the humans, and the humans couldn't see them, they could hear them. And that made it worse, knowing that their friends were just out of their reach. Even worse was their anger. After Corvus's revelation, it felt to Shade as if everything he had known about his life had collapsed around him. And Ashmore felt the same. Both of them felt betrayed by their friends that they thought would always tell them the truth.

Finally, on the fifth day, something happened. A group of two guards appeared, and opened Sam's cell. "Wait, what are you doing?" he asked. "Stay away from me!"

Two more guards appeared at Nick's cell and unlocked it. They shoved a sack over his head, cuffed his wrists and dragged him down the

hall. Nick fought, but it was no use; they were much stronger than he was.

After several minutes of this, they finally arrived at a destination. Nick felt himself being forced into a chair and strapped in. Once he was secured, the bag was ripped off of his head.

Three men were in the room with him. Two of them were fully armed guards; the ones who had brought him here. But the third was wearing a different sort of clothing; a black, long-sleeved shirt with the Phoenix logo on it, and a pair of black pants. His skin was tannish in color and his eyes were a deep green. His short, greasy brown hair was combed back.

"I'm going to make this quick and simple," said the man. "Corvus wants me to beat some sense into you. But I'm not going to do that just yet. First, I want to know what you really think about his offer."

"What offer?" asked Nick.

The man rolled his eyes, sighed, and said, "You have two choices. You can join us and live, or stay with your friends and die."

Nick didn't want to die. But he didn't want to betray his friends. He knew his choice. "Fuck you," he said.

The man grinned, and reached for his gloves, which were placed on a stool next to him. "Wrong answer," he said.

Back in his cell, Matt was waiting for the others to come back anxiously.

"What do you think they're doing to them?" he asked Andrew, who was across from him.

"I don't know," he replied.

Just then, Alena was dragged back in by the guards. She was put back into her cell to the right of Andrew.

Matt pressed himself to the transparent wall. "Hey!" he called. "Are you okay?"

Alena stood up. There were several bruise covering her face, arms and legs. "They beat me up a little," she said. "But I'm fine. It wasn't as bad as last time."

Matt flinched at the mere mention of the incident in Gunnerville. "What did they want?" he asked.

"They wanted me to join them," said Alena. "They said they were going to 'beat some sense into me.' But I refused."

Matt nodded. "Good. I'm sorry you had to go through that, though."

Suddenly, two more guards arrived, carrying a limp body between them. They stopped at Sam's cell, to the left of Andrew's, and opened it. When it was open, they pulled the bag off of Sam's head and tossed

him inside.

What Matt saw filled him with dread. Sam landed on the ground and lay there, unmoving. "What did you do to him?" he demanded.

The guards ignored his question, and instead opened his cell. "What are you doing?" Matt asked. "Stay away from me!" He held up his fists threateningly.

One of the guards struck him in the stomach. He doubled over in pain, and they seized his arms. He was helpless now, and despite his struggles they were able to cuff and bag him with ease.

His heart pounded as they led him through the halls. All he could think about was Sam. Beating was bad, but he could handle it. Whatever they did to Sam, howeverâ€¦

He heard the guards open a door, and his breath caught in his throat. He felt himself being shoved into a chair and restrained. Then, finally, the bag was lifted.

Dr. Corvus was grinning at him.

Matt struggled to escape his confinement, but it was no use. "I swear when I escape, I'm going to put a bullet in your face."

"I'd like to see you try," said Corvus. "But anyway, enough of your pathetic fantasies. Time to talk about real life. I'm going to ask you this question once. If you say no, there's no takebacks. My offer is simple. Join us, and you'll live. Don't, and you'll die. What do you say?"

Matt spat at him. "Never," he snarled.

Corvus frowned. "Hit him," he said. One of the guards lifted his hand and smacked Matt across the face. A wave of crunching pain spread through him, and he grunted, but was able to bear through it.

"It's a shame," he said. "You must have been something special to befriend a beast like that. We could have used you. But, it doesn't matterâ€¦ I just spent a very frustrating time trying to pry answers from your friend the scientist. Fortunately, I was able to catch the name of the lab he was using, but my patience was not otherwise rewarded, and it is practically non-existent now."

"What the fuck did you do to Sam?" Matt demanded.

"The same thing I'm going to do to you if you don't shut up and cooperate. Now, here's another offer. How close are you to that monster of yours?"

"Shade isn't a monster," Matt seethed. "He's a friend."

"I take it that means you're very close indeed," said Corvus. "Tell me, how did you become friends with him in the first place? How does one like you befriend a monster like that?"

"I saved his life," said Matt. "I came for him in his hour of need."

Corvus chuckled. "You really think he's your friend? He's an _animal_. He's just following you for convenience."

Matt shook his head. "You're wrong. You're _so _wrong."

"No," he said. "I don't think I am. Anyway, it seems like you feel very close to him. So I'll give you this offer. It's too late to join us. But you can save him from a bad fate. If you convince the others to join us, I'll put aside my lust for revenge and grant him a quick, painless death. But if you don't, I'll make sure he suffers, and I'll draw out the pain for hours before I finally kill him."

His words sent fury through Matt's veins. But at the same time, they made him think. _I can't let them take us,_ he thought. _There has to be some way to get out._

But what if there wasn't? What if they were going to die no matter what they did? _I can't put Shade through thatâ€¦ If he has to die, I want it to be painless._

But then he remembered Gengar and Jack. The ghosts had stayed behind to help them. Matt didn't remember seeing them when they had all been in the same room. Maybe they were still out there, and could still help.

Even if that wasn't true, he had to believe something was possible. He refused to go down without a fight.

"No," he said. "Fuck you." He spat at the doctor's feet.

Corvus scowled at him. "Fine," he said. "Your beast is going to die an incredibly painful death. And since you've condemned him to that, it's only fitting that you join him."

"Wait, whatâ€¦?" Matt turned pale. "What are you talking about?"

Corvus turned to one of the guards. "Bring me my equipment. The same that we used on the other one."

Matt felt a surge of panic rise in him. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"If you want to dedicate your life to dragons," Corvus answered, "Then I'm going to make sure you die like one."

The guard returned with a small suitcase. He handed it to Corvus, who placed it on small table next to him. He opened it and produced a syringe and a bottle of clear liquid. As he loaded the liquid into the syringe, he explained what was happening.

"Your little stunt in Boston forced our hand," he said. "We need to get rid of these creatures that plague the world. Our plan is in danger if we don't. We're going to activate the Exterminator, and when we do, all of them will die."

He squeezed a drop of liquid out of the syringe, and then produced a cloth. He dampened it with a bottle of water, walked over to Matt, pushed up the teen's sleeve and wiped his shoulder clean. He then warned, "This might feel a little weird."

He pushed the needle into his skin. Matt winced and squirmed; he hated needles. Then, he felt a sort of numbness as the liquid entered his bloodstream. It disappeared quickly, but not before spreading to other parts of his body like a ripple.

Corvus wiped the needle dry and discarded it into a trash can. He went back to the suitcase and started to get another needle ready.

"Let me explain to you how the Exterminator works," he said. "When it goes off, it'll send out waves that will kill anything that they come across. In order to keep it from killing humans, we had to set filters. The Exterminator will leave humans alone, but anything that has DNA that matches anything created in our laboratories will be killed. Including your precious _pet._"

Matt lunged forward in a mixture of horror and anger at that comment. "No!" he yelled. "I won't let you!"

"It's too late for that," said Corvus. He approached him with another needle. Matt tried to lean away, but his restraints prevented him from doing so. Corvus injected him again. At first, there were no side-effects, but once the liquid reached his heart it created an aching feeling in his chest. "What is this?" he demanded.

Corvus ignored his question. "Unfortunately, we weren't able to figure out a way to make the death painless. It's an incredible agony, really. One that you'll soon experience."

As he spoke, he pulled another needle and another bottle out of the suitcase. This bottle was different, however. It was filled with a thick, dark red liquid.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Blood," said Corvus. "From your dragon. With this in your veins, the Machine will recognize you as one of them. You'll die the same agonizing death as your beast."

Matt struggled. "No!" he exclaimed. "No, you can't! It's impossible! My body will fight it off."

"Why do you think I gave you those other two solutions?" he asked. "The first one is a poison that disables your immune system for three days. While it's inside you, your body will sit back and let this happen. As for the other solution, it contained nanobots designed specifically to make sure that your heart will pump more of it. So on the off chance that you manage to escape and defeat us- which, let's be honest, isn't going to happen- you're a dead man anyway. After three days, there will be so much foreign blood in your bloodstream that your immune system will practically tear you apart trying to kill it."

He finished talking, and approached Matt with the syringe readied.

"No!" Matt yelled. "No, you can't do this to me!"

"Unfortunately, the reaction the blood makes with the chemicals is a

littleâ€¦ uncomfortable, to say the least," Corvus explained. "This might sting a bit."

Despite all of Matt's struggles, he still couldn't get free. The needle poked into his skin, and the blood was injected into him. At first, there was nothing. But then, when the blood reached his heart, a searing agony tore through him. It felt like his chest was on fire. He screamed and thrashed, but nothing seemed to make any difference. Finally, one more needle pierced his skin, and slowly, the pain faded away.

Along with everything else.

"Bring him back," Corvus ordered as he put the equipment away. "And interrogate the rest. I'll be in my quarters if you need me." He stared the guards down. "Don't need me."

As he was leaving, he sensed something was wrong. He looked behind and saw the guards staring at him.

"What?" he asked. "Someone had to pay for what happened in Boston."

He turned and left without another word.

58. Chapter Fifty-Seven: The Boss

****I don't really have anything to say this time. Here's the new chapter!****

****Four chapters, including this one, until the finale.****

****Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.****

*** * ***

<p>Chapter Fifty-Seven:

****The Boss****

****Somewhere beneath the White Mountains****

Giovanni came for him that afternoon.

His arrival was announced by a knock on the door of his quarters. Maverick stood up from his bed to let the guest in.

"Sir," he said. "To what do I owe the honor?"

"Spare your false courtesies, Colonel," said Giovanni. "We both know you can't stand the sight of me."

"Can you really blame me?" asked Maverick.

Giovanni's face turned a slightly deeper shade of red. "I'll ignore that one, for your sake," he said. "I've been instructed to bring you to Corvus."

"Why?" asked Maverick. He instantly regretted it.

"Do you treat all your superiors like this?" Giovanni demanded. "When I tell you to come, you come! Understand?"

Maverick sighed internally. "Yes, sir," he said.

"If you must know, Corvus is taking you to meet the Boss."

Maverick couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Is this some kind of joke?" he asked

"Yes and no," said Giovanni. "It isn't a joke, but I feel like it might be. We introduce all of our elite to the Boss. For whatever reason, Corvus thinks you're worthy."

Maverick didn't know what to say. "Iâ€¦ I'm honored," he said.

"Yeah, yeah," he said. "Come on."

They left his quarters and walked down the hall. Giovanni led them to an elevator and pulled out a key. He stuck it into a lock in the elevator panel and turned it, allowing them access to the forbidden bottom floor.

The elevator smoothly lowered itself into the depths of the base. They rode in silence. Maverick couldn't guess as to how Giovanni was feeling, but he himself was elated. _Things are going to get much better from here,_ he thought. _Despite the fuck-up in Boston, things are going to be okay. _This meeting was going to change everything.

The elevator _ding_ed and the doors slid open. The hallway beyond was the same as the one above; bright and white. The only difference was that it was empty, save for two guards on either side of the single door at the end.

"Beyond that door is the Boss's meeting room," Giovanni explained. "And beyond that, his private quarters."

"Have you met the Boss?" asked Maverick.

"Does a bear shit in the woods? Of course I have."

"I thought only Corvus was allowed."

"You'd be surprised how much we haven't told you," said Giovanni.

Maverick could hardly bear the anticipation as they walked down that hallway. It was short, but it felt like a mile. The guards silently looked at Giovanni, who pulled out an ID. "It's me," he said. "And this is Maverick."

Each guard pulled out a scanner and scanned their retinas. Then, they took their fingerprints and blood samples. "Lots of security," Maverick remarked.

"No, I didn't notice," Giovanni retorted sarcastically. "Of course

there's a lot of security. This is the center of our entire operation right here! Oh, but that's not a problem, there's certainly no way anyone would take advantage of an opportunity to slip in unchallenged. In fact, we should just strip all the security, tear down the door, and hang up a sign that says, 'Come and kill our leader!'_"

Maverick decided to leave it alone.

When the security tests were finished, they were allowed to pass. Giovanni opened the door.

Beyond was a room that matched the color of the hallway. It was large, with a great round table in the center. A television screen covered the wall to their right, and to the left was another door. Sitting at the table were General Maynard and Dr. Corvus.

"Welcome, Captain," said Maynard. "Have a seat, both of you."

Incredulous, Maverick walked to the nearest chair, pulled it out, and sat down. Giovanni sat next to him. "Yes, I'm fine, thanks for asking," said the older man.

Maverick was wondering where the Boss was. Corvus must have seen the confusion on his face, because he said, "We'll be starting shortly. As soon as my son gets here."

"You have a son?" asked Maverick.

"Well, not where the rest of this organization is concerned. I like to keep my personal relationships as inconspicuous as possible. But yes, I do."

Suddenly, they heard a faint ding through the door. The elevator, he thought. Corvus's son must be here.

The sound of muffled voices came through the door, and once the newcomer passed the security tests, he was allowed in.

"Sorry I'm late," said Lucas. "A couple of privates got in a fight and I had to break it up."

"Wait," said Maverick. "You're his son?"

"Yeah," said Lucas. He pulled up a chair and sat down. "I see the new recruit is here."

"Yes," said Corvus. "He is."

"So are we just gonna sit here flapping our gums, or are we actually going to start this thing?" Giovanni demanded.

"Don't we need to wait for the Boss?" asked Maverick.

Lucas smiled slyly. "He doesn't know, does he?" he asked.

Maverick was confused. "I don't know what?" he asked.

"There is no Boss," said Corvus. "The whole thing was made up to

avert suspicions. _We're_ the ones in charge."

Maverick wasn't sure what to say. "Ohâ€¦ Why make him up, then?"

"I'll explain everything to you in time," said Corvus. "Right now, we're talking about you."

"Meâ€¦?"

"Yes, you. Lucas has told us a lot of great things about you. But let's start at the beginning." He picked up a piece of paper. "Christopher Maverick," he read. "Born May 9th, 1984, the son of Andrew and Julia Maverick. At age 18 you joined the army. You served for four years in Active Service before being released to inactive reserve. During this time, you became involved in an organization of criminals. To make a long story short, you were arrested for bank robbery."

Maverick sighed. "That was a bad time. Prison wasn't really my thing."

"Then don't rob banks," Maynard retorted.

"You were still in prison during Z-Day. Taking advantage of the chaos, you, your friends, and another prison gang led by one John Carlton broke out. After the country fell, you wandered. Eventually, you came across a town named Gunnerville, and decided to stay there for good. You took over the town and set about trying to build your own government. But it all went sour when you picked a fight with our good friends Sam and the Seven Freaks. The rest, as they say, is history.

"Moving on to your service here. You were promised an officer's position within our army. But you quickly rose from there. Your recent promotion to Colonel was a result of your bravery and prowess in Boston. You showed a determination to succeed that very few of our men have ever shown.

"But what really is bringing our attention here is your personality. As I understand it, you and my son have grown close. And he's told me some very interesting things about you. You're not just some mindless soldier; you're a thinker and an opportunist. You're _smart,_ and are willing to do what it takes. And for that reason, we think we can use you."

"Use me for what?" asked Maverick.

Corvus grinned. "As a member of this council."

"â€¦ Say what?" asked Maverick.

"You heard me," said Corvus. "You see, this council was meant to have five members. Each member was to be secretly integrated into the organization to hide their true identity. We came up with the character of the Boss to distract people from the true leaders; us.

"And if they were to kill any of us, we would be immediately replaced. Each of us has an apprentice, whom we have trained to take

our place should something happen. The only people who know who they are sit in this room. Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"Yes," said Maverick, grinning. "If one head is cut off, another immediately grows in its place. Very smart."

"The only way for this army to lose its leadership would be to kill all ten of us off at once," said Maynard. "And to do that, you would have to be extremely lucky. But the problem is, our fifth member _and_ his apprentice were killed in Boston. We need a replacement."

"So, what do you say?" asked Corvus. "Do you want to join us?"

Maverick opened his mouth to reply, when suddenly, Giovanni let out a choked coughing noise. He turned to the man, eyebrow raised, and asked, "You okay?"

Giovanni waved a dismissing hand. "Yeah," he said. "I'm fine."

Maverick looked back to Corvus. "If I accept your offer, what would that imply?" he asked.

"Well, first of all, you can never say anything to anyone about this," said Corvus. "You'll have to serve your superiors, even if they aren't in this council. But once we meet here, you'll have a say in _everything_ that happens."

Maverick took a moment to consider. Then, he said, "Okay. I'm in."

Corvus then made him swear an oath. Once that was done, he told him the history of the council.

"We were created at around the same time as the zombie pathogen," Corvus explained. "The original member, my predecessor, approached the Department's leaders with the proposition of the Phoenix plan. But he kept his true intentions secret. He saw all of the corruption and pain in the world, and sought to purify it. The only way this could be achieved would be to wipe out the majority of the population out and starting from scratch. Up until then, he could only dream. But then he found his weapon."

Maverick was stunned. "Areâ€¦ Are you saying Phoenix _intentionally_ released the pathogen?"

Corvus smiled. "Yes. For years, we planned for this. Then, once we were ready, representatives of ours from every lab contaminated the water supply. Didn't you ever wonder how it broke out of every location in one day? Or why the military, strong and powerful as it was, failed? It was because of _us!_"

"And in two days, the final phase of our master plan will be put into action. We're going to go to the Exterminator and activate it, wiping out the zombies once and for all. Then, we'll find what survivors we can and round them up. We're going to start a new world- a _better_ world- from the ashes of the old one."

Maverick was conflicted about this. No matter how much he agreed with the founder's opinion on the state of the world, killing everyone off seemed a bit much. Still, it was what it was. And being the kind of man he was, he refused to let go of the opportunity he had seized.

"Well, you got me out of jail at least," he said. "So I have to thank you for that."

"Now that you know our story," said Corvus. "Do you have any questions?"

"Yeah," said Maverick. "Why Night Furies? Why create something from a kiddy flick?"

"You're asking the wrong questions," said Maynard. "You should be asking why are Night Furies in said kiddy flick in the first place?"

"We have systems in place to keep our secrets," Corvus explained. "To dispel any possible rumors, we integrate our experiments into pop culture somehow. If someone says, 'oh, the government is making dragons,' then a few months later everyone will think they're crazy. They'll say, 'oh, that wasn't a government experiment, those were designs for a DreamWorks movie!'"

"So you've had them for a while, then?" asked Maverick.

"Almost from the beginning, as I recall."

Maverick asked a few more questions, and then they moved on to more important matters.

"As I've said before, in two days' time we're executing the next phase," said Corvus. "Giovanni, have your men finished extracting the information we need?"

"Hmm?" Giovanni asked, having just been broken out of a daze. "Oh, yes."

"He told me earlier," said Maynard. "We know where the boy kept the DNA for his monsters now. I've sent men to get samples to add to the Exterminator. His monsters will die along with him and his dragons."

"I hope you sent a lot," said Maverick. "I'm sure you've heard the story about that place."

"From what I've heard the threat has been neutralized," said Lucas. "It shouldn't be a problem."

"Good," said Corvus. "And I trust you've begun the conquest on Philadelphia?"

"The city should be ours within a week," Maynard confirmed. "A suitable replacement for Boston, I'd say."

They talked for another half hour, before they were finished. The meeting was adjourned, and they stood to leave.

"I expect we'll be holding another meeting in three days' time," said Corvus. "Same time as usual. If we all do well, I might even let you guys visit your families in New York! Now if you'll excuse me, I have some unfinished business with the _vermin_ that took my eye."

As they were leaving the room, Lucas spoke to Giovanni. "Hey, can I talk with you alone for a moment?"

Giovanni frowned in confusion. "Sure," he said.

When everyone was gone, Lucas turned to look at Giovanni. "Funny," he said. "Usually you have everything to say about everyone. But today you've been silent."

Giovanni shrugged. "I'm just not talkative right now."

Lucas grinned slightly and chuckled. He slowly paced over until he was eye to eye with Giovanni. "I don't think so," he said.

Without warning, he lunged forward, shoving Giovanni into the wall. "I saw something," he said. "A glimpse of your eyes. Your true eyes. Get out of him you monster."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Giovanni gasped.

"BULLSHIT!" Lucas yelled.

"I don't know!" Giovanni pushed forward then, breaking free of Lucas's grip. Lucas stumbled back, and struck out with his fist. Giovanni dodged it, and then punched into Lucas's stomach. The man doubled over in pain, and Giovanni closed his hands around his neck.

He squeezed as tightly as he could. Lucas struggled to break free, but Giovanni flipped him over and pinned him to the ground.

The man's struggles grew weaker, until finally, they subsided. Giovanni removed his hands and stood up.

The last thing Lucas saw before the darkness took him was a flash of red in his eyes.

59. Chapter Fifty-Eight: Fight or Flight

Woops! I accidentally missed a day, didn't I?

Sorry about that. I'll keep on top of things from now on.

Anyway, here's the next chapter.

After this, two left until the finale!

Disclaimer: I don't own HTTYD or Pokemon.

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifty-Eight:**

****Fight or Flight****

****Location unknown****

The guards came once more that day.

Matt had woken up just a few minutes before their arrival. He had no idea how long he had been out, but after talking to his friends, he determined that it had been a couple hours. His chest ached, and his veins felt odd, but other than that, none of the intense pain from before was present.

I'm going to die, was the only thought that was present in his head. It seemed impossible. He _couldn't_ die. He couldn't leave his friends alone; not when he was needed most. He couldn't leave _Shade alone.

His train of thought was broken by footsteps outside of his cell. He looked up and saw five guards walking past him. They stopped a while later, and the next thing he heard was Shade's growling. Then, a cry of pain, and struggling.

"No!" he yelled. "What are you doing? Stop!"

Shortly later, the struggling stopped. The guards returned to where they had come from, with Shade being wheeled by behind them.

Matt yelled after them, but it was no use. Shade was gone.

Gengar walked down the hallway in Giovanni's body, his hand clutching a pistol he had stolen from Lucas's body, concealed beneath his lab coat.

After leaving Lucas behind, Gengar had dispatched the two guards, and then locked them all in the room. Then, he had taken the elevator up.

I have to find Shade, he thought. _Shade's in danger._

Corvus hadn't explicitly said what he was going to do, the nature of his intentions was clear; Shade had taken his eye. And now he was going to return to favor, and God knew what else.

Gengar paused to look through Giovanni's memories once again to confirm he was going in the right direction. Then, he kept moving. When he was sure nobody else in the hallway was with him, he asked softly, "You still with me, Jack?"

He could feel her presence behind him, as her psychic waves radiated off of her. "Good," he said.

Their plan was a simple one. When they found Shade, Gengar would dispatch the guards and then create a distraction a distraction. Jack would go ahead and release their friends, and then they would escape. Somehow.

They rounded another corner, and that was when they found him. The dragon was being escorted by a squad of five guards. Three of them in front of him, and two behind. They were about to turn into an

adjacent hallway, when Gengar called out to them. "Hey!" he yelled. "What are you doing?"

The guards had paused. Gengar noticed this with satisfaction. He walked over to them. "Well?"

"Sir," said one guard. "We were ordered to escort the beast to Doctor Corvus."

"Ohâ€¦" said Gengar. "Well, what are you waiting for? Keep moving!"

He feigned turning to leave, but then appeared to change his mind. He turned to the guards and said, "Hey, take off your helmets for a moment? There's something I want to check about them."

"All of us?" asked one.

"No, just me," Gengar said sarcastically.

The guards took their helmets off and held them out to him. "Thanks," said Gengar. He reached forwardâ€¦ and then whipped his hand back and pulled out his pistol.

"Hey-!" yelled the guard. His voice was cut off by a gunshot.

Five shots echoed through the hallway. Five bodies fell to the ground.

Almost immediately, an alarm went off. Shouting could be heard in the distance. Wasting no time, Giovanni plucked a key off of a guard's body and turned to Shade. The dragon was looking at him in astonishment.

Giovanni smiled at him, and briefly allowed his true essence to be visible in his eyes. Shade's pupils dilated in shock, and Gengar chuckled.

He approached the platform and stuck the key into a lock. Turning it, he released the dragon.

Just then, a group of soldiers turned around the corner. "Shade!" Gengar yelled. "Get them!"

Ben blinked in confusion as the alarm went off.

"What's going on?" someone yelled at the guard. But there was once again no response.

After a minute of this, a guard suddenly screamed in agony. A few gunshots cracked through the prison room, but then those were silenced as well. Then, a bright light was cast by a figure that materialized in the center of the room.

"Jack!" Sam yelled in a combination of shock, excitement, and relief. "It's so good to see you!"

Jack smiled, and touched her fire to Sam's cell door. It immediately caught fire and melted onto the floor. One by one, she went to the other cells and did the same. Once they were all free, Ben said, "We

need weapons. Do you know where the armory is?"

Jack nodded, and turned to leave. The others followed her.

At the end of the hallway was a door. It was locked, but they easily broke the lock and escaped. As they entered the hallway beyond, they found a directory that revealed them to be on the bottom floor. As opposed to the massive building that was Aperture, this structure only had ten sub-floors. It appeared that not much scientific experiment happened here, as the base was instead intended for the housing and training of troops.

"Well, that sucks," said Alex.

"How the hell are we going to get all the way to the top?" asked Joey.

"We can do it," said Ben. "We just need weapons. Where's the armory?"

Further study of the directory revealed the armory to be five floors above them. An elevator was nearby, and they changed their course to go there. As they turned another corner, however, they ran into a squad of guards.

"Freeze!" one of them yelled. But before they could do anything else, they exploded in a flash of fire. When the smoke cleared, it pulled aside to reveal Shade standing next to a middle-aged man in a lab coat. The man was carrying a gun, and as he approached them, he stopped to kill the guards.

"Hurry," he said. "Take these guns! We need to get to the elevator!"

"Who the hell are you?" asked Ben.

Without warning, the man's eyes flashed a deep, inhuman red.

"Gengar!" Sam exclaimed. "You're alright!"

"You're a sight for sore eyes," Matt remarked. "Both of you."

They collected some guns from the bodies of the guards. Then, they proceeded to the elevator right down the hall. They pressed the button, and a short time later it arrived. The white doors opened to reveal another white room. It was spacious and circular, with a touch panel on the side from which the elevator was controlled. They couldn't all fit it, but they managed to squeeze in Shade, Matt, Ben, Alena, and Alex.

"Get ready," Ben said. "They might be waiting for us at the top."

The four humans gripped their guns and Shade braced himself. Finally, they reached their intended floor. The elevator dinged, and the doors slid open.

Nobody was there.

Matt breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank God," he said. They exited the elevator and waited for the others. Outside, the hallway was much like the previous one, except with more doors. It was pure white, and brightly lit.

After a few more trips, everyone else was up with them. "Come on," said Gengar. "Before more guards show up."

As if on cue, they heard footsteps around the corner. "Run!" Ben exclaimed. Gengar ducked into another hallway and they followed him.

The soldiers saw them and gave chase. By the time they reached their next turn, bullets began to fly. Ben turned around and shot back before ducking around the corner.

The armory was at the end of the hallway and guarded by four soldiers. "Ashmore!" Gengar yelled. "Clear them away!"

Ashmore opened his mouth and shot a plasma bolt at the guards. They tried to duck, but the bolt struck them and flung them away. Gengar ran over them, forced the door open and ran inside. One by one, the others followed him, squeezing through when need be. Once they were all in, Ben slammed the door shut and locked it.

The armory was an average-sized room. It was composed of a central aisle with four shelves to either side of it. Each shelf was stocked with armor, ammo, guns, knives, and grenades.

From outside, they could hear the alarm blaring and soldiers yelling. "We don't have much time," said Gengar. "Get what you need, and be quick about it!"

Ben quickly slipped into a suit of armor and grabbed a sidearm and as much ammo and grenades as he could carry. Around him, his friends were doing the same. Even Samantha and Sam were taking guns, as their personalized weapons had been taken when they were captured.

Right as they were ready to go, an explosion crashed through the room. Ben jumped in shock and covered his ears. As they rang, he saw that the door had burst open and bullets were flying through it. Two of them tore into Gengar's vessel; one hitting him in the chest and the other in the head. The ghost responded by grabbing a grenade off of a nearby shelf. He pressed the button in the center and tossed it at the squad.

"Get down!" one of them yelled. The grenade exploded, and a searing white light burst through the room, blinding everyone.

Ben struggled to find cover through his blindness. He eventually found a shelf protruding from the wall and ducked behind it. When he regained his sight, he turned around and saw that many of his friends were behind cover as well. The Pokémon who had been able to avoid the blast were at work dispatching the soldiers.

He lifted his gun and pulled the trigger to help them out. When all of the soldiers were dead, he slumped back and took a deep breath.

"Come on!" Nick yelled. "We need to get out of here!"

Ben stood up and turned to the door. One by one, he and his friends exited the armory and regrouped in the hallway beyond.

"Alright," said Gengar. "We have five more floors to go until we get to the top floor. Let's get back to the elevator and-"

Before he had even finished talking, the lights went out. "They cut the power!" Gengar yelled. "Damn it!"

They had no time to think. More soldiers were coming, and from the sound of it, a lot of them. _We won't be able to outrun them,_ Ben thought.

"Go!" Gengar yelled. "I'll distract them and meet you at the staircase! It's near the elevator! Hurry!"

They ran as fast as they could. Once they got back to the elevator, they stopped to catch their breath.

"Anyone know where the staircase is?" asked Joey.

"Nope," said Matt. "No idea."

"Gengar said it was somewhere around here," said Sam. "Do you know where it is, Jack?"

Jack nodded, and turned into another hallway. The others followed her. They quickly reached the stairwell and entered it.

"Five more floors," said Matt. "We can do this!"

After one floor, however, they were met with resistance. A door slammed open two flights above, and footsteps came in. A flashlight beam shone on them, and a voice yelled, "Hey! There they are!"

Damn it, Ben thought. He immediately ducked out of sight as a rain of bullets split through the air.

He couldn't see well, but what he could see he shot at. He leaned out of cover and fired at them. His bullets weren't doing much damage, as they were missing. But what they did succeed in doing was distract the soldiers from the dragons and PokÃ©mon. Shade and Ashmore were shooting what little shots they had left, knocking the guards back. Some fell off the stairwell. Swampert was causing mini earth tremors, Lily was shooting electricity, and Jack fire. Reuniclus was using her psychic energy to incapacitate them.

Finally, the last soldier fell, making all of their enemies either dead or unconscious. They continued.

When they reached the top of the stairwell, they emerged into a lit hallway.

"I thought the power was out?" Samantha asked.

"They must have cut power to that floor," said Ben. "A ploy to keep us down there."

"One of us still is," said Sam. "We have to go back for

Gengar."

"Gengar will be fine," said Joey. "You saw what he did. He can handle a few guards."

"â€|Okay," said Sam. "But I'm not leaving this lab without him."

Ben nodded. "We'll see him again, I promise."

Before Sam could say anything else, they heard more footsteps. They quickly ran down the first hall they could find and ducked behind it, praying that the soldiers would pass them by. They did.

"There's got to be a map somewhere," Alena whispered.

_"__No need,"_ said Reuniclus. _"Jack knows the way."_

"Good."

When they were certain the coast was clear, Jack led the way through the brightly lit hallways. Almost all of the doors they passed were closed, and those that were open were also vacant. Whenever they turned into another hallway, they would always check to make sure there were no security cameras. If there were, Reuniclus would use her abilities to deactivate them.

Finally, they reached the exit. It was in a lobby much the same as that of Aperture's, with a reception desk and three hallways branching off of it. They had come down the hallway in the middle.

"Wait," said Sam. "We have to wait for Gengar."

"We can wait for him outside," said Alex. "I don't want to be in here any longer."

"Butâ€| Fine," said Sam. "_You_ can wait for him outside."

"Don't be like this, Sam," said Matt. "If you wait in here alone, you might as well be saying 'kill me now, I don't care!'"

"You're right," said Sam. "But I _don't_ care. Not if it means I can save Gengar."

"I have a better solution," said a voice to their right. "How about you _all_ _stay_ here?"

They whipped their heads towards the sound, and saw Lucas step out. His throat was bruised, and his eyes had a wild, angry flare to them. But other than that, he was very alive.

Ben immediately raised his gun, and the others followed suit. "You've got balls, Lucas," he said. "But you're not stupid. Where's your backup?"

Lucas smiled, and gestured. Five more soldiers appeared behind him. One of them was dragging Gengar's vessel.

"No!" Sam exclaimed. He lunged forward, but Joey caught him and held him back.

"I should kill you all right now for doing this," he said. "Giovanni was an asshole, but he was crucial to our plans. The only reason you're still alive is because the Doc wants to make an example of you."

He shoved Giovanni's body onto the ground and held his gun to it. "Get out," he commanded. "Now!"

Gengar weakly raised his hand and stuck up his finger.

Lucas reached his hand back, and a soldier placed a container of salt in it. "We've been doing research, see," he said. "With the genetic makeup Gengar has, you left him with one weakness. Salt." He opened it, and poured some onto Gengar's vessel. He yelled in pain, and then lay still. A few seconds later, Gengar materialized in his true form on the ground next to him.

"Stop it!" Sam yelled.

"Okay, fine," said Lucas. "I'll stop it." He dropped the salt, and pulled out his gun.

"You can't shoot him!" Joey exclaimed. "He's a ghost!"

But as Ben watched, he saw that that was wrong. He could see fear in Gengar's eyes. He was going to die.

"He's in his physical form now," said Lucas. "He can be touched. He can bleed. He can _die._"

He raised his gun and aimed it at Gengar. "No!" Sam yelled.

But just as he was about to pull the trigger, the air was punctuated by the screams of two of his soldiers, impaled by the flaming arms of the previously invisible Jack. They fell to the ground, writhing in agony before finally coming to a rest. Before anyone could react, another had fallen.

Lucas and the last two wheeled backwards, shooting in the air. One of the bullets struck one of Jack's appendages. Sam gasped as she appeared in the air, one of her arms hanging low and bleeding. "Get out of there!" he yelled.

Ben ran across the room, grabbed Gengar by the arm, and fired at Lucas. One of his bullets struck him in the arm, and he clutched it in agony. He then pulled Gengar back and punched the button on the elevator.

By that point, Lucas's other two backup soldiers had fallen prey to Jack, and Lucas himself was incapacitated. The elevator doors opened behind them, and Ben shoved Gengar inside. "Get in!" he yelled. "Biggest targets and wounded first!"

He himself stayed behind, while Jack, Swampert, Shade and Ashmore managed to squeeze in, with Matt and Sam behind them. The two humans had been struggling for a while now; whatever Corvus had done to them was holding them back.

One of them pushed a button inside, and the door closed. The rest of

them waited.

Ben turned to Lucas. "Now then," he said, approaching the man. "What to do with you."

"Kill me," said Lucas. "Do it. I know you want to."

"Oh you have no idea," said Ben. He raised his gun and pointed it at the man. But, just as he was about to pull the trigger, the lights went out.

"Every time!" Joey yelled. "God damn it!"

Ben heard a noise in front of him, and shot. He waited for his eyes to adjust, and saw a bullet mark scuffing an otherwise clean and empty floor. Lucas had escaped.

"He got away!" Ben yelled. "Be on the lookout! Lily, power the elevator!"

They watched the hallways, praying for the elevator to get back soon. The darkness and silence set their nerves on edge, and every small creak made them jump.

After almost a minute of this, something finally happened.

A yell cut through the silence. "More soldiers!"

The central hallway burst into a storm of gunfire. Ben moved to the wall next to it, flattening himself against his newfound cover and looking out and shooting when he thought it was safe. The soldiers were tough to see, and it was hard to hit them.

Finally, the elevator doors opened behind them. Ben moved back to guard Lily, and Kody stayed at the opening of the hallway, drawing fire while the others moved inside. Their armor gave them the protection they needed to move from point A to point B safely.

Once everyone was inside, Ben yelled to Kody. "Come on!" he yelled. Kody turned to look at him, and at that exact moment, a grenade flew out of the hallway. "Get down!" Ben warned. He retreated into the hallway as the grenade exploded, leaving a blinding white light that penetrated into his skull. A high-pitched ringing noise filled his ears, and beneath it, he heard footsteps. As soon as his vision cleared, he saw that Kody was lying on the ground, and the soldiers were standing above him, guns ready.

No, he thought. _Not today. Not again._

He pulled another grenade off of his belt and ran headlong into the group. The soldiers saw him coming, and as he threw the grenade, they ducked away. Ben grabbed Kody by his arm and dragged him into the elevator just as the grenade exploded, creating a massive fireball.

Joey and Brian held the door open while Lily retreated into the elevator. Her backside was singed, but she was otherwise okay. Once they were all safely inside, they let the door slide shut.

"Lily," said Samantha. "Can you get us up?"

Lily nodded weakly, and smashed an opening in the elevator's control panel. She stuck her legs in it and gave it power.

They rose in silence. The elevator jerked and shuddered, but they made it to the top without further incident. When the doors opened, they found themselves facing out into a dark staircase with a light shining from the top. Ben took a deep breath and stepped forward.

When they emerged, they were in an old, rundown shack. The shack's front door was open, and through it, he could see Matt waiting for them.

"Thank God you guys are okay," he said. "Now let's get out of here, before anything else happens."

60. Chapter Fifty-Nine: The Calm

****After this, there will only be one more chapter before the finale! That last chapter will be posted on Sunday. I will write what's going to happen to my update schedule then.****

****Disclaimer: I don't own Pokemon or HTTYD.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Fifty-Nine:

****The Calm****

****Somewhere in the White Mountains****

After they left, the first thing they did was patch up Jack's wound.

"How did this even happen?" asked Alex. "She was invisible, and they still shot her!"

"I used some of the same DNA in Jack as I did Gengar," said Sam. "They must have put some salt in the bullets they used. That's the only way it could have happened."

After she was better, they fled as quickly as they could. In the nearest town, they hotwired some cars and fled even faster.

It turned out that they had escaped in the mid-afternoon. They drove until the sun started to set, just as they were at the edge of the Mount Washington Valley. That was when they decided they needed to rest. They were fatigued from their ordeal, and needed to recuperate.

They picked a house and parked in the back yard. The house was a red, two story building of about average size, with only two entrances; a front door and a back. They quickly scanned to see if any zombies were in the vicinity, then got out of the car.

The first thing Matt did when they got out of the car was to go find Shade. He hadn't gotten a chance to properly speak to his friend

after they had escaped, and he wanted to know if the dragon was okay. But when he greeted the reptile, Shade merely glared at him and turned away.

Before Matt could pursue him they were all called to attention by Alex. "Time to scope this place out. I'll go around front," he said. "Some of you come with me. The rest of you go in from behind behind."

Matt went with Alex. As he turned to look for Shade one last time, he saw his friend walking in the opposite direction. A twinge of pain pricked at his heart. Then, he shoved it away and went to do his job.

They searched the entire two-story house. The ground floor had a living room, a kitchen, a bedroom, two bathrooms, and a sitting room. The upper floor had more bedrooms, bathrooms, and the like. There were only two zombies in the entire building, and they were easily dispatched.

Immediately after there were finished, they set about boarding up the windows. A group was sent out to get food, while everyone else's wounds were patched up. Finally, when everyone was back, it was dark out, so they built a fire and gathered around it.

"We need our rest," Brian was insisting. "We're in no state to do anything."

Some of them agreed with him. Sam, however, was having none of it. "No," he said. "We can't. We have only two days from now to stop them, or it'll be too late!"

"I think Brian is right," said Alena. "We need to do something; I agree. But not tonight. We need to get some energy back."

"You don't _understand!_" Matt exclaimed. "They have Night Fury DNA registered into the Machine! If they set it off as it is now, _Shade and Ashmore will die._"

This silenced the others for a bit. None of them wanted the dragons to die.

Suddenly, Reuniclus spoke. _"Gengar wants to say something," _she said.

Sam sighed. "Fine," he said. "He can take me." He closed his eyes and Gengar disappeared. Sam twitched briefly, and then he opened his eyes. "Hey guys. It's Gengar. I have an idea," he said.

"It better be a good one," said Joey. "We need good ideas right now."

"We need some time to recuperate," said Gengar. "I say we get some rest. Then, first thing tomorrow, we wake everyone up and plan. I have some information that might prove crucial, and I'll tell you what I know then."

There were some more protests, but in the end that plan won out. They finished eating their dinner and caring for their wounded, planned a night watch, and went to bed.

Matt got some blankets and slept on the couch. He waited for Shade, but the dragon never came. He tossed and turned for a while before he finally drifted off to sleep alone.

The next morning, Matt woke up and went to relieve Sam, who had the watch.

He went outside and was surprised to see that Sam was alone. Ashmore was nowhere in sight. "Good morning," he greeted.

"Hey," said Sam.

"Where's Ashmore?"

Sam sighed. "I don't know," he admitted. "He's stopped talking to me."

"Shade isn't talking to me either," said Matt. "This really sucksâ€¦"

The two kept talking for a while, and then went inside to wake the others. When they were all up and eating, Gengar seized control of Sam's body and presented his findings. "There was a meeting," he said. "A meeting of the most important members of the Phoenix Initiative. I managed to possess one of the members, and was able to infiltrate the meeting and discover their intentions."

Over the next several minutes, he discussed what he had learned about the Initiative, from their true role in the breakout of the pathogen to their plans for the future.

"Sometime tomorrow they're going to set off the Exterminator," Gengar explained. "When they do that, Shade and Ashmore will die, and the final stage of their plan will be set in motion. There's more, too. Aperture's a big, and normally finding our DNA stash there could take days, but they seem to know the place inside and out. They would know where it would be. They're going there today, and they're going to find the DNA of me and the rest of us PokÃ©mon. We're going to go the same way as the dragons."

There was silence. Then, Matt spoke up.

"We have to stop them," he said, shaking with rage. "We can't let them fuck this world up any more than they have."

"Think about it, though," said Alena. "If we stop them, we choose the zombies. Is that really what we want?"

"I can't believe you just said that!" said Samantha. "We're talking about our friends dying! We're talking about the world being taken over by Phoenix! Is that really what you want?"

"No," said Alena, shaking her head. "But I don't want the zombies either. We need to think this through."

The meeting suddenly erupted into a cacophony of yelling and arguing. Some of them were yelling at Alena, Alena was yelling back, and others were trying to shut it up. Finally, Evan broke the argument up with a yell.

"EVERYONE SHUT UP!" he yelled.

They all turned to stare at him in shock, shutting up in the process. "Thank you," he said. "I don't like loud noises."

"__If you'll let me speak, I have a solution,"_ said Reuniclus. "_We can go in and stop them, then figure out a way to tamper with the Machine to remove the Night Fury and PokÃ©mon DNA. That way, we don't die."_

Matt nodded. "I second that," he said.

By the end, everyone was behind Reuniclus' idea.

"But how are we going to do this?" asked Ben. "That's the next question. We really don't know anything about what we're getting into."

"If you want, I'll lead a scouting party," Alex volunteered. "We can see what we're up against."

"That might be the best option," said Jean. "I'll go with you."

"Me too," said Nick.

In the end, they decided to do that. Alex, Jean, Nick, Evan, Andrew and Lily volunteered to go. When the matter was decided, they set off.

As Matt watched them go, his mind once again wandered to his condition. He had decided not to tell anyone because he didn't want to worry them. But once this was all over, he would.

He just hoped he would survive until then.

Samantha was sitting on the couch in the house, tinkering with an iHome she had found next door. Her sonic gun had been taken during their stay in the Phoenix base, and she was trying to craft a new one. So far, it wasn't working out, because she didn't have the proper materials.

She looked up as someone entered the room. It was Alena. "Hey," she said to her friend. "What's up?"

"Trying to make another sonic gun," Samantha replied. "You?"

"Eh, not much." Alena sat down. "You okay?"

"Yeah," said Samantha, somewhat unconvincingly. "You?"

"I'm nervous, to tell the truth," said Alena. She sat next to Samantha on the couch.

"We've been through crap before," said Samantha. "We can do it again."

"Oh save it," said Alena. "We both know this will be different. This will be Boston all over again."

Samantha was silent. Then, she said, "I killed someone in there. _We_killed people. How could we just do that?"

"We had to," said Alena. "You heard what they did; they deserved it." She turned to face her friend. "It's hard, I know that. You never really get used to it. And that's _good_. You should never get used to it. But it's something we have to do now."

"I knowâ€|" said Samantha. "I'd just give anything to not have to."

Alena put her hand on her shoulder. "I know," she said. "I know."

They sat in silence for a while. Then, Alena said, "If we don't make it, I want you to know something."

"Nope," said Samantha. "Don't go talking like that. Nothing's going to happen."

"I hope not. But if something does, I need to tell you this." Alena took a deep breath, and said, "In the normal world, we probably would have never been friends. But this isn't the normal world. And you saved me, in more ways than one. Thank you."

Samantha smiled at her. "Don't thank me," she said. "I was just doing what was right."

Alena leaned forward and hugged her tight. Then, she stood up and left her to her weapon crafting.

Sam was alone in one of the bedrooms.

There was no point to doing anything anymore. He was going to die in three days if he was lucky. He had ruined everything for everyone, he knew that. If he'd been able to keep his damn mouth shutâ€|

But he hadn't. They'd beaten him and cut him. His scars were hidden by his clothes, but they were there, and they hurt. He couldn't take it, and he had screamed one word. He'd had no idea what they'd use it for. Now he did. And now his family was going to be slaughtered.

_"__Sam?"_ he heard a voice say. _"Are you okay?"_

"Hey Reuniclus," he said distantly. "Yeah, I'm fine."

The PokÃ©mon drifted into the room. _"No,"_ she said. _"You aren't. What's wrong?"_

"Everything," Sam said. "There's not a single thing going right, and it's all my fault. And now you're going to die."

Reuniclus drifted over to him. _"You're hurting,"_ she said. _"I can tell. I can't even imagine what they did to you, but I know it must have been bad to get you to talk. You only said one word, and how were you supposed to know what they would do with it?"_

"How can you say that to me when you're the one who's about to die?" Sam asked. _"Your_ life is in danger. And it's my fault. Why aren't

you mad?"

_"__I am mad,"_ said Reuniclus. _"Just not at you. I don't believe this is your fault."_

"Try telling that to the others," said Sam. "Elizabeth ignores me. Gengar's hiding it better, but when he possessed me earlier I could feel his anger. And Ashmore won't even look at me." He sighed. "Besides, that's not the only thing I'm talking about. Everything, I repeat, _everything_ is my fault. If I had never been involved in the fight with Gunnerville, we would have never gotten their attention and this would have never happened. We should have just left Lyndrich when we had the chance."

_"__I disagree,"_ said Reuniclus. _"You stood up for us, and fought against those terrible people. I respect you for that."_

Sam sighed. "Whatever," he said. "I put you in danger, and I can't forgive myself for that until I know you're safe. Besides, what does it matter? I'm going to die anyway."

_"__What do you mean?"_ asked Reuniclus.

"They did something to me," he said. "As punishment for all I've done. They put dragon blood in me. In three days, a chemical keeping my body from fighting back will wear out, and by that time I'll have so much foreign blood in my body that it will tear itself apart. If the Machine goes off, I'll die. If it doesn't, I'll die anyway."

_"__Butâ€¦ You can't dieâ€¦"_ said Reuniclus. _"After all we've been through."_

"Well, I am," said Sam.

_"__Noâ€¦ We'll find a way,"_ she said. _"We have to."_

"No we won't," said Sam. "I'm dead, and that's that."

_"__Youâ€¦ You're giving up?"_ asked Reuniclus. _"How can you do that? There has to be something in that base that could help you!"_

"We have three days, Reuniclus!" Sam exclaimed. "Even if we can beat them at the Machine, they'll still hold the base! We can't pull that off in so short a time." He looked at her, a tear falling out of his eye. "I'm sorry," he said. "But it's too late."

_"__Noâ€¦ I refuse to accept that,"_ said Reuniclus.

"You're going to have to," said Sam. "Because when I'm gone, you're going to have to be the one to help the others communicate with the humans. You're the only one who _can._"

In truth, he had wanted to talk to her about this.

Reuniclus struggled to regain her composure. _"When were you planning on telling the others about this?"_

"After tomorrow," he said. "I didn't want them to die worrying. If

they survive, I'll tell them." He paused. "I'll make sure they survive, whatever it takes."

Elizabeth was several blocks away, in the street killing zombies.

She turned away from the corpse in front of her and immediately locked onto another. In a series of swift, fluid movements, she leapt over to it and punched it so hard its head caved in.

Pausing a moment to wipe the blood on her hands off onto the grass, she turned to look for another one.

I'm going to die soon, she thought. _Might as well take as many of these down with me._

She didn't see how they were going to get to the Machine in time. They had gotten lucky in Boston and in the base. Luck like that didn't strike three times.

She found another zombie and ran towards it. In her mind, its head morphed to match Sam's. As she destroyed its head, a twinge of guilt rippled through her. She supposed she was being too hard on him; he didn't deserve _that._

But then again, that's what he's done to us, she thought.

She cleaned her fist again and repeated the process. Lock on, run, punch, clean, repeat. Five zombies later, the street seemed more vacant. But there were still zombies left, and they were getting close. She ducked away and ran behind a building, circling around it to throw the zombies off of her trail. It worked.

She singled out a loner and ran towards it, swinging her fist. But just before she hit it, its body flew into the air and its head exploded. She stumbled past it and fell onto her knees, her arms held out to break her fall.

"You shouldn't be out here alone," a voice said behind her. "It's dangerous."

She sighed. "What do you want, Gengar?"

"You to come back," he said. "You'll get yourself killed if you stay out here alone." He floated down to her and held out his hand in an offer to help her up.

"I'll be fine," Elizabeth replied gruffly. She pushed his hand away and stood up on her own. "Just run along and mess with someone else."

Gengar sighed. "Look," he said. "I don't want to fight anymore. If we're going to die, I want there to be peace between the two of us."

Elizabeth looked at him. "Are you apologizing for being such a dick?"

"Wellâ€¦ Yes," he said. "You could put it like that."

Elizabeth wanted to say something. All their petty arguments were meaningless now, she knew that. She wanted to open up just this once. But she couldn't bring herself to do it. She gave him a glare, and said, "Apology accepted," she said, her voice betraying nothing. "Is that all?"

Gengar looked crestfallen. "Yes," he said. "I'll leave you alone now."

He headed back towards the house. Elizabeth watched him go. _Wait,_ she wanted to say. _Come back!_

But she said nothing.

Later on, when it was Matt's turn to stand guard, his thoughts turned to Shade for the umpteenth time. The dragon had gone flying sometime before, for what reason Matt didn't know. He supposed he was hunting. That had been a while ago, and he hadn't returned.

He was tired of being ignored, and had finally come to a decision about it. When the dragon returned, he would confront him.

But it was another half hour before he actually returned. The dragon landed in the front yard, on the other side of the house from Matt.

Matt walked around the house. "Shade!" he called as the dragon came into view.

Shade looked up at the sound of Matt's voice. He quickly turned away as he remembered that he was ignoring the human. He wanted nothing to do with him now.

He made his way towards the house to find Ashmore. Matt tried to get in his way, so Shade violently shoved him aside.

"Hey!" the human protested. Shade ignored him and kept walking.

"You have a problem with me?" Matt asked. "Fine. Let's talk about it!"

Shade paused, and then decided to give in. Maybe it would get him to go away. He turned and looked back at Matt, his pupils narrowed to slits. "What do you want?" he asked.

"What's wrong?" Matt pleaded. "What did I do? Is this about that whole thing with your birth?"

Shade growled at the mention of the revelation. He had spent his whole life assuming that he had been naturally born, only to have that illusion ripped away as brutally as possible. He knew he shouldn't care, but he did.

"I'm sorry about that," said Matt. "You didn't deserve to find out that way. But nobody thinks any less of you! You're still the same dragon no matter what!"

Shade growled ferociously at him. "I know that, idiot," he said. "That's not what's wrong at all. You're so blind!"

But that wasn't it. He knew Matt, and knew that the human knew _exactly_ what Shade's problem was; he was just delaying the inevitable.

"You knew," he accused. "You knew, and you _never_ told me?_ I had to find out from _Corvus?_"

He didn't care that Matt couldn't understand him. And it seemed his point had gotten across, as Matt got the gist of it.

"Iâ€¦ I'm sorry," he said. "I'm so sorry. I wanted to tell you; I was _going_ to tell you, butâ€¦"

"Shut up!" Shade yelled. "Just stop! I don't want to hear your excuses." He turned to leave. "I can't talk to you right now. Leave me alone."

"Wait!" Matt yelled. "Please! I didn't want to see you hurt! I know that backfired, but it's the truth. Everything in this world is just so fucked up that I didn't want to ruin one more thing for you."

Shade stopped. Some part of him, deep inside his heart, wanted to forgive Matt. But he couldn't bring himself to do so just yet. He turned to face him one more time. "You know what your problem is, Matt?" he asked ruefully. "You're so afraid of hurting your friends that you don't even try to help them sometimes."

And with those parting words, he left him standing there aghast on the front porch.

From there, he went to find Ashmore. The dragon was taking a nap in one of the upstairs bedrooms. He nudged his friend awake and said, "Hey."

"Hey," Ashmore said groggily. "How are you?"

"Surviving," said Shade. "For now, anyway. You?"

"Same," said Ashmore. "What's up?"

"You've been up here all day," said Shade. "I wanted to know if you wanted to get out."

Ashmore sighed. "What's the point?" he asked.

"None, really," said Shade. "But you should come anyway."

The dragon groaned, and stretched. "Fine," he said. "But only to get out of this house."

The two Night Furies made their way downstairs and out the front door, ignoring the humans they passed. As soon as they left the house, they spread their wings and took flight.

For a while, they flew in silence. Finally, Shade broke that silence by saying, "Matt came to talk to me earlier."

"And?" Ashmore asked, his voice betraying no emotion.

"I'm still mad," he said. "I don't know how long I'll stay mad." He looked down for a moment, and then looked at Ashmore. "How about you and Sam?"

Ashmore stiffened at the name. "Let me put it this way," he said. "Matt betrayed you. He knew about your birth but he didn't tell you. Be thankful that's all he did."

"What do you mean?"

"Sam hasn't been the same since we found Aperture. He's done some great things, yes- but at a price. His mind has been warped. He's not the same boy I became friends with." He paused, and it was clear that the next sentence was hard for him to say. Finally, he said, "That boy died a long time ago."

Jean sighed in relief as they turned onto the road they were staying on. They had made it back. Now they just had to tell everyone what they had seen. The thought filled him with dread.

He thought back once again to the events that had unfolded on top of that mountain. The six that had set out climbed Mount Washington as stealthily as they could. It had taken them a while- all day, in fact. But they had reached it. The Phoenix army had amassed, and it was bigger than anything they had ever faced. It was as if the entire population of Boston had gathered in one place. The army was determined not to fail again.

There's no way in, Jean thought once again. There's no way we can get past all of them. We've failed.

The dragons were going to die, and the Pokémon too. During their spying, they had witnessed a delivery of the DNA samples Gengar had said they were looking for. Phoenix had the Pokémon's DNA, and now they could kill them.

Just before they had left, Evan had accidentally alarmed one of the soldiers by creating a rustle in the woods they were spying from. They had managed to slip away, but Jean's heart had been in his mouth all the way back. They had no way of knowing if they were being followed.

None of that mattered now. They were back.

With bad news, Jean thought. Yay for us.

They turned into the driveway of their house and unloaded the car. Kody greeted them outside and said, "Good to see you guys again. How'd it go?"

"Good," said Nick. "Or bad. Depends on what you mean."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll tell you inside," said Andrew.

They gathered in the kitchen, all of them; even the dragons and Pokémon. When they were all together, the scouting party described what they had seen. When their story was finished, Jean looked over the faces of their friends. They looked crestfallen, defeated, and

sad.

"That's it, then," Matt said. "It's done. We lost, and now the dragons die."

_"__What about us?"_ asked Reuniclus. _"We're dying too!"_

"Wait," said Sam. "Maybe not."

Everyone looked at him, eager to hear what he had to say. He looked deep in thought. Finally, he seemed to come to a solution. He smiled, and said, "I have an idea."

61. Chapter Sixty: The Stone Giant

****So I'm pretty sure this is a little late. I'm sorry about that, I got a new job that's been keeping me really busy. But it's here now. This is it; the end of Book One.****

****Enjoy.****

* * *

><p>Chapter Sixty:

****The Stone Giant****

****Somewhere outside of Boston, Massachusetts****

They had been driving nonstop since Sam had left.

Nightfall had come about an hour ago, and everything was dark. It was not yet late enough for the moon to illuminate the landscape, and everything was cast in shadow. Sam sped down the highway as quickly as he could, with Reuniclus sitting beside him.

Oh, I hope this works, the PokÃ©mon thought. Not only was their plan incredibly dangerous, but her life depended on it as well.

"We're getting close," said Sam. "Do you remember the plan?"

_"__Yes,"_ Reuniclus thought aloud. _"I do."_

"Good," said Sam. "Thanks for coming with me. I needed it."

_"__What do you mean?"_ she asked.

Sam sighed. "I wanted to see you hopeful one last time, because it's probably not going to happen again. You're like a daughter to me, Reuniclus, and all I want is for you to be safe and happy."

_"__Dying isn't going to help that,"_ said Reuniclus. _"You have to be alive to do that."_

Sam sighed. "We've been over this. There's nothing we can do except make sure there's someone left after I go. I'm not leaving this world

with you guys in tow; I just won't do it! If that makes you mad, so be it!"

"What makes me mad, Sam, is that you won't even try. You've already given up."

Sam sighed. "You want to know why? Because I don't want to spend my last moments searching frantically for something that probably doesn't exist!" A tear formed at the corner of his eye. "If I'm going to die, I want to end my last moments to be with you guys."

Reuniclus didn't know what to say.

Ahead of them, the city of Boston lay in wait. They were close, and should have been able to see it, but they couldn't. Gigalith's explosion had destroyed everything and reduced it to rubble. There was nothing left but dust and ruin.

It was easy to tell when they entered the blast radius. The road became much rougher, as a lot of it had disintegrated. What hadn't been was left ragged and rough. The air grew cloudy with ash that had still not yet fully settled. It was like a nuke had gone off.

Thinking back, Sam realized that was fairly close to the truth.

They drove for a while longer, searching for the chasm that Gigalith had emerged from. As they drove, they were both deep in thought. Finally, Sam broke the silence.

"I still can't believe he's gone."

Reuniclus was having a hard time accepting it as well. Trent had been a good friend to all of them.

Sam sniffed. "And Jeremy too. I wasn't as close to him as some of the others were, but he was a good guy. I don't think I can lose any more friendsâ€|"

Reuniclus wanted to give him some comfort. But instead, all she could say was, _"How do you think the rest of us feel?"_

She could tell she had struck a powerful blow. He continued driving in silence, his hands gripping the wheel until the knuckles turned white. His face remained staring straight ahead.

Finally, they reached the pit.

Reuniclus stared in a mix of wonder and shock at the scene. The ash floating through the air gave everything a murky quality, and combined with the size of the crevice, made it impossible to see all the way to the other side. The pit stretched down into darkness. It looked like the edge of the world.

Sam pulled his car to a halt and took a deep breath. Then, he exited the vehicle and waited for Reuniclus.

"Ready?" he asked.

_"__Yeah,"_ Reuniclus replied. _"I just hope this works."_

The two of them walked up to the edge of the pit and peered down. "Wow," said Sam. "That's a _looooong_ way. Is she down there?"

Reuniclus closed her eyes and focused. Calmly, she sent her energy down into the pit, looking for the leviathan. She stretched herself further than she had ever gone beforeâ€¦

â€¦And then she found her.

_"__She's down there,"_ said Reuniclus. _"Sleeping, by the looks of it. But down there."_

Sam sighed. "So she's alive?"

_"__Yes."_

"Good. This might actually work. Can you get down there and wake her up?"

_"__I think so."_

"Okay. Good luck."

With a nod, Reuniclus levitated and lowered herself into the pit. Gigalith was far down, and it was several minutes before she could even see her. But when she did, she gasped.

She remembered how big Gigalith had been, but she was still shocked. She couldn't fathom how she had grown so massive in so short a time. _How did that happenâ€¦?_

She stared, mesmerized for a few more minutes, until finally she wrenched herself free from her trance. _I've got to focus,_ she thought. She reached out her energy and probed at the leviathan's mind, trying to wake her. But gently. Very, very gently.

There was a rumble, and the ground around her vibrated as Gigalith woke up. Her head rotated upwards until she was facing her. Then, she spoke. Her voice was deep, slow, and almost unbearably loud, as if it were the voice of an earthquake.

"Who are you?"

Reuniclus gulped, and her heart skipped a beat. "Iâ€¦ My name is Reuniclus," she said. "I'm like you."

"Nobody is like me," she said. "I am alone. Now go away."

"No," said Reuniclus. "I can't. You're one of us. I can't leave you." She could feel Gigalith's anger rising, but she couldn't turn back now. "We were made in the same lab. By the same person."

"You wereâ€¦ made by GLaDOS?"

"Whatâ€¦? No!" She tried to find the words, but was interrupted by Gigalith.

"Then we are not the same," said Gigalith. "She created me, and told me everything I needed to know. Then, she abandoned me here, in the outside world. Now, go away!"

"Justâ€¦ Please! GLaDOS didn't really create you! She's a liar! I know who did, and he's here!"

"Whatâ€¦? Really?"

Reuniclus's spirits lifted. "Yes," she said.

"Prove it."

"Iâ€¦ I'm not sure how, Gigalithâ€¦"

The giant shuddered suddenly, and Reuniclus could feel her mood change. "How do you know my name?" she demanded.

"Iâ€¦ I told you. I know your creator."

There was silence for a moment. Reuniclus could tell that she was thinking it over. Then, she asked, "He is here?"

"Yes," said Reuniclus. "He is. And I can introduce you to him. All you need to do is come up to the top."

"Very well then," said Gigalith. The earth trembled as she repositioned her legs. Then, she lifted herself up, rested it on a gigantic foothold in the earth, and started to climb.

Reuniclus rose as quickly as she could. Gigalith was just barely going slower than her, and there were several times where she was worried that she would get hit by the rock giant. But in the end they made it to the top without incident.

She came out of the pit first and glided over to Sam. _"I got her," _she thought to him.

"I can tell!" Sam exclaimed back.

The rumbling in the earth was intense, and Sam was struggling just to stay upright as Gigalith rose above the earth. Finally, when she turned to face him, he fell backwards.

"So this puny thing is the one who made me?" she asked.

"Yes," said Reuniclus. "But he can't understand you. I'll need to translate."

"Tell him that I want proof," Gigalith said. Tell him to explain everything to me."

Reuniclus relayed the message to Sam. _"She wants you to tell her what happened." _

"Can you understand me?" asked Sam.

"Yes," said Gigalith, her voice edged with surprise. "I can."

Reuniclus nodded to him.

"Then I'll tell it directly to you."

He told her his story of Aperture, starting from when he found it and ending when he created her.

"I should have known that you wouldn't show the same vitals as other creatures. But I assumed that you would, and when you didn't, I left GLaDOS to deal with you." He knelt down and bent his head. "I'm so, so sorry."

Gigalith was silent. For what seemed like forever, she said nothing. Finally, she spoke.

"What you're saying goes against everything I knew about my originâ€¦ Yet I didn't know that much to begin with. Since you seem to know so much, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. But let me make this clear. I do not like you."

Reuniclus translated for her.

"I don't expect you to," said Sam. "I only wish to ask you one favor before I leave your life forever."

"And why would I do anything for you?"

Sam stood up. "Because your life will end if you don't. Not at my hand, but at that of my enemies. They're going to kill everything that was created in those labs tomorrow, and the only way to stop it is to join up with us."

That seemed to resonate with her. She was silent for a moment, as if considering the validity of his words. Finally, she spoke. "Before I say anything else, let me ask you a question," said Gigalith. "Answer me truthfully. What happened to GLaDOS?"

You better think carefully about what you say next, Sam, Reuniclus thought. _One wrong word hereâ€¦_

"She's dead," said Sam.

Reuniclus braced herselfâ€¦ But the Gigalith seemed surprisingly calm. "How?" she asked.

"There was aâ€¦ disputeâ€¦ between her and some friends of mine," said Sam. "She tried to kill them and they beat her to it."

"Good," said Gigalith. "I'll help you."

"Wait, what?" asked Reuniclus. "Until just a minute ago, you thought she was your creator! Why would you want her dead?"

"She abandoned me in more ways than you ever did," Gigalith explained. "When I was just opening my eyes for the first time, she cared for me. She taught me everything I knew. But then, when I knew just enough to survive on my own, she started to put me through tests, as if I were her pet. Then, when she was done with that, she kicked me out. And that was when I realized what kind of creature she really was. So yes, I do owe you a debt. What can I do for you?"

Sam gulped, and then explained everything to her, and what he wanted her to do.

"That's a lot to askâ€¦ But it can be done. Very well. I will do what you ask."

"Thank you," said Sam. "Thank you so much."

"But know this: if I ever see you again, I won't be nearly as welcoming."

"I understand," said Sam.

"Good. Now, where do you want me to go?"

Sam thought for a moment. "How fast can you travel underground?"

"Very fast, if I'm deep enough, and there's nothing in my way. Why?"

Sam smiled. "Good," he said. "We'll show you where to go."

"Yeah," said Reuniclus. "Waitâ€¦ How are we going to do that?"

"Well, we'llâ€¦" Sam frowned, and cupped his chin in thought. "Huh."

62. Chapter Sixty-One: The Storm

****Chapter Sixty-One:****

****The Storm****

****At the base of Mount Washington****

"Are you ready?" Ben asked.

Next to him, Kody shook his head. "No," he said. "You?"

"Not at all."

"Well that's comforting."

Ben's chest was nothing but a nervous fluttering. No, not a fluttering; a tearing. It ripped and tore at his other emotions and feelings until there was nothing left. And he could tell his other friends were feeling the same.

They were camped at the base of the mountain, in a small area in the woods, covered by foliage and surrounded by snow and undergrowth waiting for Sam to get back from his mission. Once he did, he would send Reuniclus a signal, and the battle would begin.

"Can someone explain to me where the hell Sam is?" asked Joey. "It's well into the morning already! He's late!"

"This is just a guess, but I'm pretty sure moving a towering rock giant into position from several hours away is a time-consuming job," said Anthony.

"I do wish he'd hurry up, though," said Matt. "The anticipation is killing me."

Ben sighed and turned to his right, hoping to find Alena. Instead, the closest friend to him was Ashmore.

He approached the dragon and gave him a pat on the neck. "You ready?" he asked.

Ashmore gave a tentative nod. Ben was surprised to see in his eyes that he was just as nervous as they were.

Suddenly, they heard a stick crack in the woods. They whirled around to see Sam emerging from the treeline. "Nice to see you, Sam," said Joey.

"Is it done?" asked Ben. "Is she ready?"

Sam nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Although they're probably suspicious at the very least, now. This needs to happen now or never."

Jean nodded. "Then do it," he said.

"Alright guys, get ready!" Kody exclaimed.

They crouched to the ground, keeping as low as possible, trying as hard as possible to go unnoticed. Yet the danger remained; nowhere on the mountain would be safe once Gigalith emerged.

When it was time, Sam pulled out his walkie, pushed the button, and said a single word.

"Go."

Reuniclus was waiting on the other side of that link, at the base of the nearest mountain. Gigalith was waiting underground, waiting for Reuniclus' command. She too was waiting in a forest, but she had the car they had taken as well; a blue 2002 Impala they had found on the side of the street and hotwired.

The walkie was lying on the driver's seat, and the window was open. She levitated there, waiting for the command.

Finally, it came. There was a rush of static, and then one word. Just one, but that was enough.

_"Go." _

It was time.

The Pokémon extended her energy through the dirt and ground, able to stretch herself just far enough to reach the stone leviathan. _"It's time," _ she thought. _"Remember what to do?" _

_"Yes," _Gigalith said through the link.

"Then do it. Remember; only the first base. We need the second one intact."

And that was it. The ground began to quake as the giant moved. The trees quivered, and the ground seemed to rise in places as the wave moved onward. Just like that, the battle had begun.

Today's the day, thought Corvus. _The day this world becomes whole again._

Looking back, he wondered if the world had ever truly been whole. _Even before the pathogen, the world was a horrible place,_ he thought. _All we did was rip its beautiful skin and exposed the rotten flesh beneath._

These kids that were fighting him should be thanking him. Everything he had done he did for the sake of humankind. He had seen what the human race was capable of doing. It could cure, it could _create._ But it could also destroy, and it had been doing more of the latter than anything else.

He remembered the day he had approached his supervisors with the first stages of the Phoenix Initiative. Back then, it had been only a fetus, but now, it was more like a full-grown hydra. _Five heads, working as one, controlling a ferocious beast._

He had been in a bad place then. But contrary to what one might expect, this depression clarified his thinking. He had never really gotten over it, but he had learned to live with it.

The Old World took you away from me, Susan, he thought. _We had a happy life and a son together, and then humanity took you away._

That was what happened when you allowed mankind the luxury of freedom. They spat in your eye and killed your wife.

The incident had opened his eyes. It had shown him that everything could be brought to an end, that nobody could be trusted, and that on the inside, every man was a filthy beast that needed to be tamed by the few who could overcome their nature. Most painfully of all, it had shown him that the individual human life was meaningless.

For a while, he had hated humanity as a whole. But then he had realized what they could do when working together. They could do great things, but only if they were united and controlled. So he had vowed to do just that: control them. He let his colleagues believe that they shared power, for that was how he was able to start this organization in the first place. But in reality, they were just puppets on a string. They weren't fit to lead, for all they wanted was power. He had tried drilling these lessons into his son, but it seemed like he had failed. Lucas was the same as all the others; just another beast. He had failed him.

But there was still time. Maybe he could arrange for his son to learn the hard way. He hated the thought of causing his own blood so much harm, but it was for the best.

Enough thoughts of the past, he thought. _Today is a new day. A better day. The monsters will die; both the living and the dead._

He had no personal qualms with the beasts at his door- well, he did now, but before he hadn't- but they were competition. He knew that if their population were to grow, they could easily threaten humanity's dominance over the world. He couldn't allow that to happen.

Perhaps he was being too cruel. But cruelty was necessary if one wanted to control the world.

He got up out of his bed and dressed in a black suit and pants with a white undershirt and a red tie. He wanted to be dressed nicely for the occasion. Then, he left his room to get breakfast.

The facility that housed the Exterminator was much smaller than their headquarters at the base of the mountain, but it was big enough to suit his needs.

But before he could reach the cafeteria, he was intercepted by his son.

"Doctor," he greeted. "May I speak with you?"

"Can it wait until after I eat?" Corvus asked.

"No. It's important."

Corvus sighed. "Okay. Where do you want to talk?"

"In the control center."

A chill went through Corvus. _This isn't good,_ he thought. _If something's happened with the Exterminatorâ€|_

"Let's go."

Lucas limped through the hallway. As he did, he explained what was happening. "The sensors have been picking up some strange activity in the area."

Corvus knew what he was talking about. He had ordered several sensors to be installed in the Exterminator to monitor any potential threats to the facility's security. They watched for everything from severe weather to seismic activity to electromagnetic anomalies. He wondered which one was on alert.

As they reached the control room door, Lucas put his eye up to the scanner. It scanned his retina and cleared him for entry. The door slid open, and the control room greeted him.

It was a massive sphere of machinery and screens. On the ground was a section of level flooring, on which was placed several computers, each one manned by its own personnel. The room was dark, with only the light from the screens to illuminate it.

As they stepped in, the door slid shut. "Show him," Lucas commanded to the personnel.

A woman approached them. She had long, glossy black hair and smooth brown skin. She was only a little bit shorter than Lucas. "Sir," she greeted.

"Tell me what's going on," Corvus demanded

The doctor led him over to her station and pressed a button. On a large screen above, the contents of her work appeared. A red light was flashing a warning from the seismic sensors.

"Our sensors throughout the valley have detected several seismic anomalies in the area, but they only seem to be affecting a small radius. That's not the weirdest part."

Another click on the mouse, and a map of the Mount Washington Valley appeared. A red line traced the edge of their map to a point about halfway between its origin and their location. It seemed to be stretching in their direction.

"This red line is the combination of all detected anomalies. As you can see, it's moving towards us."

A small pinprick of fear ignited in Corvus's chest. He quickly snuffed it and turned to Lucas. "Is this the thing that sabotaged you in Boston?"

"It could be," said Lucas. "Probably is. I don't know much about this kind of thing, but I'm pretty sure that isn't normal."

"I've never even heard of anything like this," the woman confirmed.

Corvus mulled it over in his head, absentmindedly stroking the stubble on his chin. Finally, he decided what to do. "Lucas," he said. "Fetch Maynard and Maverick for me."

"Yes sir," he said.

As he walked off, Corvus turned to the others. "Which one of you is the communications officer?"

A young blonde woman stood up. "That would be me," she said. "Why?"

"Patch a link through to the base." He looked back at the screen and watched as the red line got closer. "Now!"

The woman got to work. Once the link was established, Corvus ordered her to broadcast it to the entire room.

"Base, do you copy? This is Doctor Corvus speaking."

"__Doctor, we read you. Are you seeing this?__"

"If you mean the wave of seismic activity en route, yes, I do. Set up all defenses for the base, ASAP. I think I know what this thing is, and we can't take any chances. Arm the missiles while you're at it. As soon as you get a shot, take it, consequences be damned."

"__Sir, yes sir!" _

Lucas returned at that moment with the two soldiers. "What's going on

here?" Maynard demanded.

"Tell him," Corvus commanded Lucas.

Lucas explained the situation to them, while Corvus kept his eyes on the red line. It grew closer, closer, closerâ€¦

Until finally it was upon them.

They felt nothing but a light vibration beneath their feet. Yet suddenly, all was chaos at the other end. _"Fire the missiles!"_ a voice yelled. _"It's here! I don't care how many will die, fire the damn missiles!"_ _

Corvus listened in growing horror as the voice grew more desperate. Finally, the worst of the situation became apparent.

_ "__What do you mean, the missiles are down?! What..."_ _

Suddenly, a deafening crashing noise filled the transceiver, and then the link filled with static.

"Holy fuck," said Lucas.

Everyone in the room was still with shock and fear. Finally, a call rang in from outside.

_ " __Something's happening!"_ a voice yelled when they accepted the call. _"Something is rising out of the ground! Somethingâ€¦ huge!"_ _

"Roger that," Corvus said calmly. "We'll be sending backup. Meanwhile, I want you to do everything in your power to distract it."

He turned to the others. "Maverick, get out there and help. We can't risk this thing getting any closer. Distract it, if possible. Maynard, get our back-up missiles online. The small ones; not the ones we used to blow up Lyndrich."

Maverick rushed to the armory as quickly as he could. On the way, he stopped at the barracks to ready their troops.

After quickly getting into a set of armor and donning some choice weapons, he and the soldiers he had chosen double-timed it to the exit.

The first thing he heard when he emerged from the base was distant screaming. Then, there was an explosion, a roar, and a flash of light almost blinded him.

The monster from Boston was back, and it was more pissed off than ever.

How the fuck did it find us? He wondered. Then he pushed the thought away. It didn't matter. All that mattered was killing it.

He found the nearest truck and jumped into it. The RPG he clutched in his hands was itching to be shot, but it was too soon. More soldiers filled in, and when it reached max capacity, he gave the order to

drive.

Behind him, four other trucks followed. The beast was slowly making its way up the mountain; either it was much slower aboveground, or it was being successfully distracted. Probably both.

It took a few minutes to get to the fight, but each of those minutes felt like an hour. Every second they took was another second that the creature had to destroy. But finally, they reached the scene of the battle.

There were soldiers strewn everywhere. Some were shooting, others were dodging attacks from the beast, and others still were lying dead or dying on the ground. Collapsed trees and scorch marks were everywhere. The carnage made a long, obvious trail from the base of the mountain to them.

"Shoot!" Maverick yelled.

The machine gunners on the truck fired. The bullets seemed ineffective at first, yet it soon became apparent that they had definitely pissed the beast off. It turned towards them and shot a beam of bright light from its body. The driver of the vehicle made a sharp turn to avoid it, and Maverick was just barely to keep from falling over.

When the danger had passed, he ordered the driver to turn around and do another sweep. "Come on!" he yelled. "Let's hit it again!"

As they did this, something caught Maverick's eye. A bullet cut through the air and struck one of the grounded soldiers. He quickly followed the path of the projectile back to the woods, where at least one gun was firing.

Next to him, the machine gun fired at the rock beast. Once their pass was complete, he shouted an order.

"New targets!" he yelled. "Fire into the woods!"

The machine gunner turned to fire at the new targets, but it was only seconds later that Maverick's vision was filled with a blinding light. He felt a searing heat and then vertigo as the vehicle beneath him was lifted into the air. Clutching his RPG and pistol tightly, he pitched forward and went sprawling into the dirt.

As his vision cleared, he rolled onto his back and saw the giant's foot closing in on him. Without a moment's hesitation, he aimed his rocket launcher at it and pulled the trigger. The rocket sailed and exploded against the foot. The giant stumbled, and the foot crashed down; just barely missing him.

He scrambled to his feet and dashed for cover. The truck he had been thrown out of was on its side, surrounded by a cloak of flame, and some of his unlucky men had been pinned beneath it. He took a look over its side and saw chaos. Some of his men were on the ground shooting at the new arrivals. Others were in the three remaining trucks, firing at both targets. One of the trucks had been overturned as well.

Maverick realized that they were slowly losing.

Pulling his spare rocket from his belt, he loaded it into the launcher and fired it at the beast. Once again, it did nothing except piss it off.

He activated the radio on his suit and spoke into it. "General!" he exclaimed. "Come on, General, pick up the goddamn phone!"

"_I'm here,"_ came Maynard's voice. _"How's it going out there?"_

"Bad!" Maverick shouted back. "Fucking horrible! We're losing! Where the fuck is that missile?"

_"__It's almost online," _said Maynard. _"Give us two minutes!"_

"Hurry the fuck up!" Maverick yelled.

_"__We're going as quickly as we can," _said Maynard. _"Good luck."_

The link closed. Sighing, Maverick grabbed a gun lying on the ground near him. _Fuck you too, Maynard, _he thought.

Sam took another peek out at the battlefield. He was impressed by how well they were doing.

As soon as the battle had started, they had rushed straight to the front. A few, namely Samantha, Jack, Andrew and Brian, had stayed back to cover their retreat, should it be necessary, but they would return once Gigalith's destruction was over.

"Alright, I think we've almost got them," said Sam to those nearest him. He then got an idea. "Swampert!" he called. When he had the two at attention, he said, "What do you think about giving Gigalith some help?"

Out on the battlefield, things were only getting worse. Maverick was pinned behind his cover. Every time he tried to show his face he was shot at. But he had to move soon. The monster was always on the move.

Suddenly, the ground started to shake even more violently than before.

Oh what now? He thought. He risked another glance as the earth tremor intensified. On the field, men began to stumble and fall. And yet their enemies kept firing.

_"__ETA sixty seconds!"_

Maverick clutched his gun and aimed into the trees, but he couldn't see anything, and the earth tremors were throwing off his aim.

Suddenly, a great thump came from behind him. Turning around, he saw the monster looking down at him. Its upper body began to glow white.

There was nowhere for him to run. This was it.

He gripped his gun tightly, bracing himself. "Come on!" he yelled. "Do it!"

There was a rumbling in the distance. _"Take cover! Now!" _Maynard yelled. Maverick grinned as a loud noise filled the air around them. Everything stopped, even the beast's attack. Everyone on the field turned to see the source of the noise.

Cutting through the air like a knife, the small missile arched into the sky and over the beast's head. It flipped over in the air and sailed back down. Maverick watched, transfixed, as the missile impacted. The explosion was astounding. A great orange-and-black cloud extended to swallow the beast's head.

When the smoke finally cleared, the beast was still whole, but its face was punctuated by a massive crack. Very audibly, it began to spread across its face and down its body, and it roared in pain.

Uh-oh, he thought. _This can't be good._

"Retreat!" he ordered. "Fall back! Or get to cover! Just get the hell out of the way!"

He himself stood up and bolted in the direction of the facility. He needed to put as much distance as possible between him and the beast before it fell apart. As he ran, the cracks reached the beast's feet, and it burst outward.

He could see the shadows of the falling boulders, telling him where they would impact. One was covering him. He ducked out of the way as a projectile smashed into the ground where he had just been. More parts rained around him, and he could hear screams of pain and alarm.

Finally, it ended. He shakily stood up and surveyed the scene. The mountainside was ruined. The impacts had kicked up dust everywhere, and it was hard to see. Trees were knocked over, and blood and bodies were everywhere. Pieces of the beast's body were strewn across the ground. They looked like giant boulders, but somehow they still bled. Some of Maverick's surviving men were wandering around the wreckage, while others were pinned beneath the pieces of monster, screaming for help.

He wanted to believe that the battle was over, but he knew better. Even if their enemies had suffered casualties, they would still come. And they had to be ready for them.

He opened a radio link and spoke into it. "Everyone who's still alive, regroup at the top of the mountain! They'll be back, and we have to be there when they do! Move out!"

They had won one victory. But the battle wasn't over yet.

Ben stood up and gasped for breath. The explosion of Gigalith had kicked up an unbelievable amount of dust, and the air near the ground was pretty much impossible to breathe. For a moment, he was almost certain that he would die. But he had survived.

His helmet had been damaged in the fight, and was no longer filtering his air. A large crack in the front was making it hard to see out of, so he removed it and surveyed the scene around him with naked eyes.

Hell was the first word that came to mind. The air was so clouded with dust that he could barely see fifteen feet in front of him. What he _could_ see was terrible. Trees had been knocked over, and there were craters and scorch marks everywhere. Pieces of Gigalith dotted the ground.

"Shit," he said. "Oh, Gigalith."

He still couldn't believe she was dead. They had been doing so well, were about to _win_, when the missile had arrived. He should have seen that coming, but he hadn't. He had foolishly assumed that the only missiles were in the main base.

He looked around for his friends. They had scattered when the Gigalith exploded. He had no idea where they had gone, or if they were even still alive.

Suddenly, a moan echoed from behind him. He whirled around to face it, and saw movement at the base of a tree. Someone clad in Phoenix armor was stirring.

"Hey!" he yelled. He grasped his gun and ran to them. Holding the gun to their head, he demanded, "Who are you?"

The soldier stopped and looked up. "Hey, don't shoot!" he pleaded. "It's Anthony!"

Ben hesitated as the man removed his helmet. When he saw that it was, in fact, Anthony, he relaxed and dropped his gun.

And then they heard it. Speakers in their armor delivered the message to them.

_"__Everyone who's still alive, regroup at the top of the mountain! They'll be back, and we have to be there when they do! Move out!"_

"What theâ€|?" Anthony wondered.

"These suits must still be connected to their network," Ben explained. "Come on, we have to go after them!"

Anthony got to his feet, and the two of them began their race uphill.

It wasn't long before they reached the battlefield. The ruin was at its worst there. Bodies were strewn everywhere, and APC's were wrecked. Some of the bodies were still alive.

"Hey!" a voice called from their left. "Look out behind you!"

Ben whirled around to see Shade approaching him from the woods. He whirled back and saw a group of Phoenix soldiers. Without hesitation, he lifted his gun to shoot.

"It's them!" one of the soldiers yelled. "They're wearing our armor! Shoot them!"

Realizing he was both vulnerable and outnumbered, he turned tail and fled into the nearest clump of trees. Bullets followed him, and he turned around to fire back, being careful not to hit Anthony and Shade. The Night Fury looked back and fired a bolt of flame at the attackers, temporarily disabling them while they could get to cover.

When they reached the trees, Ben said, "Hey Shade. Good to see you. You okay?"

The black reptile nodded reassuringly.

"Glad to hear it," he said. "Have you seen anyone else?"

Shade shook his head. _No._

"Damn," Anthony cursed.

Ben heard the soldiers moving, and looked out from his cover. The group of enemies were starting to recover from the blow, and as he watched, one of them lifted their gun to shoot.

Ben ducked back behind the trees, just as a hail of bullets cut through where he had been just moments before. "We've got to take them out!" he yelled.

Anthony nodded, and pulled a grenade from his utility belt. Without even checking what type it was, he threw it.

A yell of alarm cut through the air, and the stream of bullets was cut off as a bang echoed from the battlefield.

Ben looked back, and saw that the soldiers were unbalanced and dazed. "Flash bang!" Anthony exclaimed. "Come on! Let's get them!"

They ran back into the field, guns blazing. The bullets pinged off of the armor of their enemies, but after a while they found weak points. As Ben and Anthony killed two of them, Shade raced ahead to help. He pounced on those who were down and tore parts of their armor off. Once he had access to their vital spots, he tore into their flesh with his teeth.

Suddenly, one was back up on his feet. He ran at Ben with a knife, and Ben acted just in time to save his skin. He grabbed the soldier's arm just as the knife swung towards his face, and stumbled backward. His eyes were fixated on the knife hovering inches above his face. The man tried to bring his fist into Ben's gut, but Ben caught that too. They wrestled with each other, each trying to overpower the other and save themselves. Finally, Shade stepped in, tore the soldier off of Ben, and finished him.

That was the last one. Scratching the dragon's nose, Ben said, "Thanks. I thought for a second there that I was a dead man."

Shade gurgled in response. _You're welcome._

"We need to get to the entrance," said Ben. "Preferably _before_ the army shows up and kills us. Come on, let's go!"

"What about the others?" asked Anthony.

"We don't have time," said Ben. "If they can, they'll be up there. If not, well, I don't know if we can help them."

I've got to find someone, the spider thought in panic. She was searching through the woods, trying to find one of her friends.

After the detonation of Gigalith, they had all scattered for cover. She had run one way, while the rest of her friends had run in others. She was all alone now, but was still looking for someone. Anyone.

They have to be alive, she thought. _They had to have survived that. After all this, we can't have been defeated by that._

She knew in her heart that someone was still alive. She just didn't know if they all were.

She came upon an open clearing. Or, she thought it was a clearing at first. Upon further inspection, she saw that it was the battlefield they had been fighting in.

"Hello?" she called nervously. "Is anyone there?"

Silence greeted her.

She stuck her head close to the ground and sniffed along the dirt, looking for a trace of her friends. Finally, she stopped, as a familiar scent wafted through her nostrils.

Night Fury.

Shade, she thought. _Shade was here. And recently, too. Maybe I can find him—_

"Well, look what we have here."

The voice came from behind her. She immediately whirled around to face the newcomer, and saw to her horror a group of six Phoenix soldiers approaching. They were holding their guns out, and were about to shoot.

"Get her!" the one in front ordered. Two soldiers raced out from behind him and ran at her. Without hesitation, she threw her electrical energy at them, shocking them. Their suits short-circuited and at the same time trapped them as the electricity shut down their bodies.

She then turned back towards the group. More were coming, and she threw her electricity at them. But just as it connected, she felt a sharp pain stabbing at her back. Another stab came from just below the first one, and a third followed. She became weak; too weak to hold up the flow of energy, and her electricity died.

A fourth and final stabbing pain flooded through her, and the ground

came up to meet her.

"Come on guys, we have to move," said Matt. "We have to reach the top before it's too late."

After the explosion, he had fled with Swampert close by him. The two survived, but were cut off from everyone else. It had seemed almost hopeless to go on; their one advantage, Gigalith, was dead, and they had been scattered. But they pressed on anyway. Together, they had stumbled upon first Reuniclus and Andrew, and then Jean. Jean hadn't been as lucky as the rest of them. While they had gotten away with a few scrapes, he had gotten his arm pinned underneath one of the boulders.

After Reuniclus lifted it off of him, they had examined the damage. It was severe. The appendage was broken, cut, and horribly mangled. It didn't look like they would be able to save it.

They would have to see to that later, however. They had more pressing concerns.

"Do you know where to go?" asked Reuniclus.

Matt stopped for a moment. "No!" he said.

"Wait," said Jean. "Didn't they have a bunch of trucks? We could follow their tracks back to the top. If we can get back to the battlefield, that is."

"That sounds like a good idea," said Andrew. "I'm in."

They made their way in the direction they thought the battlefield had been in. Matt wasn't sure if they were even going the right way, but he hoped they were. All he knew was that they were moving uphill.

But minutes passed, and they got nowhere. They continued through the woods but found no battlefield. The destruction was even starting to fade away.

They were lost.

Desperate, Matt held onto his hope and they kept walking for a little bit longer. But it was no use, and they knew it.

"We're lost," Andrew finally said.

That was when Matt broke down.

"GOD DAMN IT!" he yelled. "We're lost. We're hopelessly lost! Everything else has gone to shit, and now we're lost! That's just _fucking _great!"

"Dude, calm down!" said Andrew.

Matt rounded on him. "Don't tell me to calm down!" he yelled. "My best friend is about to be killed, if he hasn't been killed already!" His mind was plaguing him about that. He couldn't forget the dream he had had. Shade had died, and unless he did something about it, he would die again. But even that wouldn't work if he was already

dead.

There was an explosion in the dreamâ€¦|

He forced himself not to think about it. There was nothing he could do now except find his friends and continue fighting.

"What about us?" Jean demanded. "What about your other friends that'll be killed here, _huh?_ Do you even care?"

"Of course I do-"

"Then stop worrying about your dragon and start worrying about the rest of us. He's not the only one at stake here! I thought at first that the trick with Gigalith would work, but now I'm not even sure if we'll get out of this alive. And we _definitely_ won't if you_ start losing your shit!"_

Matt took a deep breath, and tried to calm himself down. Jean was right. He couldn't lose it, not now.

And that was when he saw it. A flash of black, and movement behind his friend.

"Did you see that?" he asked, alarmed. None of his friends replied, and he was about to ask again when he saw that they were all motionless.

"What theâ€¦|?" he trailed off as he heard footsteps from the woods beyond their position. He stepped around his friends and approached the area in question, and what he saw made his blood run cold.

It was the hooded man again.

"What do you want?" Matt demanded. "Tell me!"

The hooded man said nothing.

"Who are you?" Matt asked, a little more hesitantly this time.

The hooded man once again said nothingâ€¦| But something changed. A thought probed at the edge of Matt's mind, but he couldn't access it. The thought wasn't his; it was the hooded man's. Panicking now, Matt yelled, "Why don't you just leave me alone?"

And then it broke through, and Matt understood everything.

The Hooded Man had always been there. Even when Matt couldn't see him, he had been there. He saw everything, and he had shown himself only whenâ€¦|

When people were about to die.

And that meantâ€¦|

"Death," said Matt. "You're Death, aren't you?"

The Hooded Man nodded, and a fear unlike any he had ever felt before spread through him. Yet at the same time, he felt no immediate danger. Not from him, anyway.

"Who's going to d-die?" Matt asked shakily.

There was no response. But some further observation came to Matt. Death had never shown himself to him like this before. Which meant

There had never been a body count like this before.

And suddenly, one final revelation came to him. It came off of the figure in front of him like smoke from a fire, almost like a wave of thought energy, but not quite. Matt couldn't explain how he knew it, he just knew. He knew what was at stake. It wasn't just the dragons, or his entire group of friends, or even the country. It was everything. Deep inside, he had always felt some sort of hope that even if they lost here, and even if Phoenix took over, they would fall eventually. But somehow, Death made him realize that that was wrong.

If Phoenix took over, whatever was left of the world would end.

"There has to be a way," Matt pleaded desperately. "Right?"

Death was silent.

"Tell me," said Matt. "Tell me!"

"Who the hell are you talking to, Matt?" asked Andrew.

Matt blinked and shook his head in shock and confusion. He was back where he had been before, standing in front of his friends.

"What the hell?"

"You alright?" asked Jean.

"No," said Matt. "No, I don't think so."

Andrew sighed and stepped forward to place his hand on Matt's shoulder. "Look," he began.

Before he could finish his sentence, a shot rang through the air. Blood flew, and Jean fell to the ground.

"No!" Matt screamed.

"Get down!" Reuniclus yelled.

Not needing to be told twice, Matt ducked as a bullet sailed over his head. Judging from the sound of the gun, it was a sniper.

Another gunshot echoed from the opposite direction. It just barely missed Swampert. Furious, the Pokemon whirled around and pounded his paws onto the ground, creating an earthquake. The second shooter, who was just at the edge of their area of woods, was thrown off balance.

Another shot from the sniper. Reuniclus caught it mid-air, turned it around, and shot it back where it came from. There was a scream and

then the sniper went silent for good.

It wasn't over yet, though. Phoenix soldiers- six in total- streamed out of the woods. Matt fired at them, and so did Andrew. Swampert opened a fissure in the ground beneath the feet of two more, and Reuniclus twisted the necks of the last two. Before they knew it, only the two Matt and Andrew were fighting still stood.

Realizing Swampert's vulnerability, one of said soldiers turned his gun onto the large Pokemon and fired. The first shot missed, however. Before he could fire again, a black shape flew out of the woods, grabbed the remaining two soldiers, and took them out.

Matt was filled with an overwhelming relief as he recognized the newcomer as Shade.

"Shade!" he exclaimed. "Thank God you're okay!"

But Shade wasn't paying attention to him. He was looking at the ground near Matt's feet. Looking down, Matt saw Jean lying in a pool of blood. The sniper's round had pierced his armor in one hit, and struck him in the chest.

"Jean!" he choked. He knelt next to his friend and removed his helmet, praying that he was still alive.

His eyes were open and he was still breathing. But, his breaths came in short, jagged bursts, and he looked frail.

"Wellâ€¦" he breathed. "This reallyâ€¦ sucks."

"Guys, what the hell are you doing all the way out here?" a new voice asked. Matt recognized it as that of Ben. Footsteps approached the site of Jean's body, and faltered off as their owner saw the scene.

"Jeanâ€¦?" he asked.

"Heyâ€¦ Ben," said Jean. "I'mâ€¦ sorry you had to see meâ€¦ like this."

"Stop talking," Matt urged. "Save your strength. You'll need it."

Jean slowly shook his head. "Noâ€¦" he said. "No, I don't think so. I'mâ€¦ dead, and you know it."

A tear formed in Matt's eye and trickled down his face. "Noâ€¦" he said.

"It's okay," said Jean. "I'm notâ€¦ Afraid."

"No, stop talking like that!"

"Justâ€¦ do me a favor," said Jean. "Kick their asses for meâ€¦"

With one last shuddering breath, he closed his eyes. He never opened them again.

With a shuddering breath, Matt closed his eyes and kept them shut for a few moments. Then, he looked back up, and said, "Alright. No more fucking around. Let's kill them."

After a moment of mourning, they left the scene with Ben in the lead. None of them spoke. The only thing that left their bodies was breath and tears.

Finally, they reached a small clearing where the rest of the group had met up. They were all together now. When they entered the clearing, Sam, who had found them, looked up from the ground and ran over to them.

"Thank God you guys are okay," he said. Then, as he scanned their faces, his face darkened. "Is Lily with you?"

Reuniclus shook her head. "No. She isn't here?"

"No," said Sam.

"Great!" Ben exclaimed. "Just what we fucking need! Another loss!" Tears once again formed at the corner of his eyes.

"No," thought Swampert. "Not Lily. Not her too. Please!"

Jean was enough. Too much. But Lily was more than just a friend. She was family. If she died,

"No, stop thinking like that. That kind of thinking won't do any good for you," he scolded himself.

"We lost Jean," Ben said suddenly. Everyone stopped what they were doing and stared at him.

"What? What do you mean?" asked Sam.

"He's dead," said Matt. "A sniper got him."

Nobody really knew what to say. Tears glistened in their eyes, and several of them almost broke out in sobs. But they didn't, because they knew they had to stay strong. They couldn't win this battle if they were falling apart.

"I'm gonna make them pay," said Kody, white hot rage flooding through his teeth. "I'm going to make them regret what they've done. And not just Jean. Jeremy, Trent, hell, even Gigalith. They're going down."

There were no verbal signs of agreement. Nobody shouted or cheered, or even said yes. But they were all on the same boat.

"Let's go," said Andrew. "It's this way. Are we all ready?"

"I think so," said Samantha.

"Then let's do this."

They all got up and retrieved their weapons. Even Sam and Samantha were using guns at this point. They were past the point of caring. When they were all ready, they formed a general line behind Andrew

and set off.

As they walked through the cold, snowy forest, the tension was palpable. They were all incredibly nervous, and one could feel it in the air between them all. They all knew that this was their final stand.

We have to win, thought Swampert. _We just have to._

Finally, after a couple of minutes that felt like hours, they reached a gap in the woods. They approached much more quietly from there on until they finally reached the edge of a clearing. As they crouched down to observe, they knew that they had reached their destination.

The entrance, while ingeniously disguised while closed, was blatantly obvious when wide open as it was then. Countless Phoenix soldiers surrounded it; more than Swampert remembered ever seeing in one place before. They were everywhere.

Next to him, Anthony was shaking his head. "There's no way we're getting past them," he whispered. "There are way too many."

"You might be right, Anthony," said Nick.

"No!" Sam whispered. "We're not turning back! We've already come so far! There _has_ to be a way!"

Swampert turned his head to their conversation, and noticed that Ben seemed to be deep in thought. When he finally spoke, he said, "There was a sniper rifle back there, that bullet went right through his armor. I'll run back and grab it, definitely seems good to have, right?"

Ben walked off, and the rest of them turned back to study the squad in front of them. When he returned several minutes later, they had a battle plan in mind.

"Okay," said Alex. "Here's what we're going to do. We're going to spread out along this tree line, each picking a different spot to fire from. Ben, you're going to pick first since you have the sniper rifle. Once we're all in position, I'll give the signal- a whistle- and we all fire."

Ben nodded. "I like this plan," he said. "But obviously we can't take them all out. How are we going to get in?"

"We thought of that too," said Alex. "Once they're all suitably distracted, we're going to rush in behind them and slip into the entrance. We'll close it behind us and try to lock it to keep them busy while we get to the control room."

"That just might work," said Ben. "It's a long shot, but it's all we've got. Let's do it."

Slowly and quietly, they picked their positions, being careful not to raise the alarm. Swampert chose a spot off at an angle, somewhere to the right of where he had been before. Once he got himself settled in (it took him longer than anyone else, as he had to move even slower to avoid detection), Alex gave the whistle.

A long, sharp note filled the air. Several of the soldiers turned in the direction of the whistle in confusion. And just as their confusion turned into understanding, Ben discharged his sniper.

A lone soldier fell to his knees, a scarlet flower blooming out of a hole in the back of his helmet. His body dropped to the ground with a muffled _thump_. And then chaos broke loose.

Bullets flew from everywhere, both to and from the woods. From either side of the army, two bolts of fire whizzed out of the tree line and into their ranks. Some of them went flying. Others were blinded. Many of them were disoriented.

Swampert, deciding to join in, lifted up his paw and brought it smashing down to the ground. The earth quaked beneath his feet, and using his abilities he opened a small fissure in front of him. The gap in the earth traveled forward at a frightening pace, and eventually reached the army. Soldiers fell forward into the gap, and when he could Swampert crushed them inside.

Still, despite all of the chaos, they were still severely outgunned, and the element of surprise would not last forever. The Phoenix army started to gain ground and shoot back. Yet somehow, all of their shots went wide, and they had a mighty hard time trudging forward.

Reuniclus, you tricky little thing, Swampert thought mischievously. _This is why we all love you._

But even that advantage didn't last, as the Phoenix army brought out their secret weapon.

At first, all they saw was Maverick pushing to the front. Behind him, some other soldiers were moving as well. Then, Swampert noticed them dragging some sort of large sack behind them.

_"__Stop shooting!"_ Maverick yelled. _"Everyone stop shooting! Now!"_

The Phoenix army ceased their fire, but their foes refused to relent. Even after they had stopped fighting, two more were struck down. Eventually, though, they finally ceased fire when the sack was pulled out in front of them.

"We have something of yours!" Maverick yelled when all was silent. He bent over, grabbed the bottom of the sack, and pulled it up and off.

Inside, all bound up, was Lily.

_No, _thought Swampert. _No, please, this can't be happening to her!_

Suddenly, Sam's voice, thick and shaky with rage, echoed from the trees. "You bastard," he said.

"Now, we're willing to make you a deal. See your beast here? We'll let it go! We'll even enter its DNA into the Machine for you! That's right; this monster will be allowed to live! The only condition is

that you come forward right now and turn in your weapons!"

"And if we don't?" a voice- it sounded like Alex- asked.

Maverick turned to the soldier next to him, who had dragged the sack forward, and nodded. The soldier produced a high-powered pistol and held it up to Lily's head.

"If you don't," Maverick explained, "It dies! Right here, and right now! Make your choice!"

The sound of arguing could be heard faintly from within the trees, but Swampert registered none of it, however. All he cared about at that moment was Lily and her plight.

As he watched, he noticed her stirring. She was waking up from whatever sort of sleep she had been in. Faintly, he heard her speak, but he couldn't make out the words.

"Lily!" he called. "Lily, can you hear me?"

"â€|Swampert?" she called back.

"Hey!" Maverick yelled. "What the fuck is it doing?"

"She's just talking!" Sam yelled back.

"Okay, no talking! Talking equals bullet to the head, okay?"

Lily was silent after that.

Swampert could only imagine how frightened she was. Just the sight of her trussed up with a gun to her head was too much for him to bear.

"Lily, don't say anything!" he said. "Just listen! We're gonna get you out of there! You're going to be okay! I promise! Just hold tight!"

And while the humans kept arguing over what to do, her fear only got worse. Finally, it reached a boiling point. What happened next was something that would haunt Swampert for the rest of his life. He was never exactly sure of what caused it. It could have been Lily losing her wits and, subsequently, control over her abilities. It could have been her trying to free herself. But it didn't matter.

What did matter was that she discharged all of her energy at that moment.

It flooded through the armor of all of those surrounding her. The soldier holding a gun to her head dropped first, followed by others around him. Maverick was able to dive out of the way just before she reached him, but the men behind him weren't so lucky. One by one, they fell, until Maverick finally reached her with his gun in hand.

One bullet was all it took to end it.

"NOOOOOO!" Swampert screamed.

Everything was silent as Swampert's roar faded away. Lily's body lay limp in a pool of her own blood.

Finally, the silence was broken by a loud wail of sorrow. _"Noooo!" _screamed Sam. _"You son of a bitch! You killed her!"_

As Ben watched the scene unfold, a white hot rage filled him. Without even thinking, he lifted his sniper rifle, looked through the scope, and aimed at Maverick. Once he had a good shot, he pulled the trigger.

The bullet whizzed through the air and connected with Maverick's thigh. It punctured a hole in his suit and produced a fountain of red. The man fell to the ground, a scream of pain tearing from his lips. Ben fired again, hoping to strike his head, but he missed. The bullet hit the soldier behind him in the stomach.

"_What are you all waiting for?" Maverick demanded. _"Kill them!"_

Once again, the clearing burst into gunfire. Two more fire balls streamed out of the woods, disorienting the army even further.

Still, there were a lot of them. And they would get the upper hand eventually. They had to find a way around, and soon.

Then, Ben had an idea. Knowing Reuniclus was somewhere near him, he sought her out. Packing up his sniper, he set off to his left to find her. And it wasn't long before he did. "Hey!" he said. "I need to talk to you!"

_"_What?" _asked Reuniclus. Her voice seemed surprisingly dry. Ben had expected her to sound sad. But in a way, how she sounded now was worse. She didn't seem sad. She sounded drained in every way possible.

"We need to get across this clearing!" he explained. "When it's time, can you deflect bullets from us?"

_"_I can try," _she said. _"But you seem to be overestimating my abilities. I can only handle so much. You'll have to look after yourself just as much."_

"Okay," said Ben. "That'll have to work. Now, I need you to tell everyone this one message; 'flash bomb.'"

Reuniclus broadcasted the mental message to everyone. Within seconds, over a dozen of the small silver spheres were flying through the air.

"Look away!" Ben yelled.

The two of them turned their heads as the flash bangs burst. The soldiers, however, weren't so lucky. They couldn't see. Some of them fired, but their bullets went wide. Others fell to the ground.

Taking his chance, Ben ran out into the open. "Come on!" he yelled. Not stopping to see if anyone was following, he arced around the

army, shooting at them as he went. A few bullets just barely missed him, and one deflected off of his armor, but none hit his exposed head.

One bullet came very close, however. It was rocketing straight for his head. Ben didn't have time to do anything, so he stood there gaping at it, sure that his time was at an end. But, just at the last second, the bullet stopped only two inches in front of his face. It turned around, and shot backwards.

"Holy shit," he said softly. He kept running.

The rest of the run was just as perilous. But, fortunately, the soldiers had other distractions. The dragons were lobbing fire balls into their ranks, and the Pok mon were distracting them in other ways. Everyone was everywhere, it seemed, and nobody knew where to shoot.

They didn't reach the other side unscathed, however. Several of them suffered wounds. Elizabeth took a bullet to the leg, and had to be helped across by Sam. Anthony took a bullet in the arm. But, in the end, they made it.

Lifting his gun, Ben shot out at the soldiers guarding the door. Beyond them, he saw Ashmore approaching in the opposite direction. The dragon opened his mouth and shot a fire ball at them, breaking up the group and clearing the way.

Ben reached the entrance first. It was a horizontal door normally hidden within the grass. Inside it was a long staircase, which he entered.

Behind him, his friends followed. When they were all finally inside, Nick, the last person in line, slammed it shut.

"Is there any way to lock it?" Ben asked.

"Yeah!" Nick called. "There's an electronic panel! I don't know how it works, though!"

"Hold on, let me see!" said Samantha. She pushed her way up, and pressed a few buttons on the screen. Finally, an audible click was heard, and the doors sealed themselves.

"That should hold them up," she said.

And just like that, they were in.

63. Chapter Sixty-Two: The Machine

****Chapter Sixty-Two:****

****The Machine****

****Inside Mount Washington****

_"__They got in."_

The room fell completely silent. All eyes were on Corvus, waiting for

him to explode.

"What did you just say to me?" he demanded.

Maverick's voice repeated, _"Iâ€¦ I said they got in."_

Corvus slammed his hand onto the desk. "How the _hell_ did you let them get through? Huh? Did you just stand back and wave them on by? Is that what we promoted you for?"

_ "â€¦ _No sir,"_ said Maverick. _"I'm sorry."_

"Yeah, well guess what? _You're fired!"_ Before Maverick could protest, he switched off the link. He stood straight and rubbed his temples, a white anger pounding beneath them.

He knew this wouldn't be the last he heard from Maverick, but he would have to deal with that later. Now, though, he had bigger problems.

"Get me a radio link with General Maynard," Corvus ordered. A link was established. _"Hello?"_ Maynard greeted.

"General," said Corvus. "Maverick's failed. Get your men over to the entrance and kill these kids, ASAP!"

_ " _Alright, sir. It'll be done."_

The link deactivated.

Corvus turned to the others. "Get this thing up and running," he ordered. "Now! I'm not waiting any longer!"

Sam wept.

As soon as they were safe (as safe as they could be in these circumstances), the teen had broken down. He sobbed into his hands uncontrollably, driven hysterical at the loss of Lily.

Hating to see him like this, Samantha stepped forward and gave him a hug. He hugged her back, and buried his face into her shoulders, still sobbing. Tears began to drip down Samantha's face as well.

"First Gigalithâ€¦ We had just gotten her back, and then they killed herâ€¦ And now this too," he sobbed in despair. "Why? How could they do this?" His despair suddenly turned into pure rage as he screamed, _"I want them dead! I want them all dead!"_

They let him cry for a minute, but then they had to leave. "Samâ€¦" said Joey. "Come on. We have to go."

Sam blinked back his tears, and then regained his composure. "Right," he said. "Let's go."

_ " _We've got wounded,"_ said Reuniclus. _"They can't fight on in this state. What should we do?"_

"Find us a room safely out of the way," Brian suggested. "We'll take it, lock it up, and hold position there until this thing is

done."

The others agreed.

"Just out of curiosity," said Alex, "Does anyone know where we're supposed to be going?"

"No," said Samantha. "But if this place is anything like the other facilities, it should have a map somewhere. Now, the only way to go is down."

Above them, they heard a pounding from the other side of the door. The army was trying to get in.

"Now, preferably," said Brian drily.

They descended the dim staircase, the only illumination coming from dull ceiling lamps positioned every five steps. The steps themselves were made of black metal, as were the walls and ceiling. When they finally reached the bottom, a shiny steel door greeted them.

"__Let me handle this," __said Reuniclus. She probed the door's lock with her mind and forced it open. The door slowly swung open and they stepped across the threshold.

Beyond, the facility was just like the others. Silver, stainless-steel walls stretched in three different directions, with florescent lights glowing in their centers. The only difference was that this time, instead of a reception desk, a directory stood in the center of the lobby area.

"Perfect," said Brian. "Just what we need."

They hadn't taken two steps before a blaring alarm was set off.

"Oh shit!" Brian yelled. He ran over to the map and studied it carefully. When he found the destination they had to reach, he turned to the others and yelled, "Come on! Follow me!"

They ran down the hallway to their left and made a right turn around a corner. The new hallway was much longer, and had several doors branching off the sides.

"It should be close," said Brian. "We can clear out one of these rooms for our wounded, and then keep going."

They stopped at the first door and tried to open it, but it was locked. Reuniclus floated over and unlocked it for them. The door slid open, and they were granted access. Not a moment too soon, either, for as soon as they began to file into the room, heavily armored footsteps echoed down from both ends of the hallway.

"They're coming!" Nick yelled. "Move!"

They all ducked into the newly opened room. It turned out to be a barracks. Bunk beds lined the walls, and metal nightstands positioned in between them held lamps. The room was vacant save for them, but it was obvious that it had seen recent use.

"Alright, you guys stay here," Alex said to the wounded. "We'll get rid of these soldiers for you."

Those who could still fight regrouped at the room's exit. Peeking his head out, Matt was just barely able to witness a squad of soldiers turn the corner. "Get back!" he yelled as they opened fire.

They ducked inside just as a stream of gunfire whizzed by. Matt waited for it to stop, before he ran across the threshold and ducked into the alcove of the door on the opposite side of the hallway. Alex followed close behind.

More gunfire rang out. "We need to clear out that end of the hallway!" Ben exclaimed, pointing towards their destination. "It's the only way forward!"

"Can Shade clear a path?" Alex asked.

Matt shook his head. "No," he said. "This is too tight of a space. He'll be shot."

"Crap!"

"Does anyone have any flash bangs left?" Ben asked. Nobody did. "Alright," he said. "Looks like we're fighting this the old-fashioned way." Without another word, he jumped across the hallway to join him.

Filling in the space in the other alcove were Alena, Joey and Andrew. When they were all in position, they leaned out and fired.

The resulting duel was long and intense. Despite being flanked, the group fought relentlessly, and gave it everything they had. They fired a few rounds at a time, and then ducked back behind their cover as the soldiers shot back. They survived, but ultimately their progress was too slow. Something had to be done.

At one point, Gengar became invisible and attacked the group of soldiers blocking their way forward. He twisted their necks, turned their guns on them, and used other, more creative ways to kill them. Finally, when the path was clear, he turned to face the group behind them.

But he never got the chance. A salt bullet ripped through his leg, causing him to fall to the ground in a fully solid state.

"No!" Sam yelled. "Gengar!" He ran forward, ignoring the shots pinging off of his armor, and reached the ghost. Then, he pulled him out of the range of the enemy.

"We've got to go!" Alex yelled. "Can the wounded hold their own against these guys?"

"Yeah!" said Anthony, who was right inside. "Just leave us some help!"

"Alright," said Andrew. "I'll stay!"

"Me too!" Nick offered.

Alena, Swampert and Ashmore offered to stay as well. Jack, Elizabeth and Anthony were the wounded. The rest of them pushed forward.

They waited until a lull in the shooting, and then ran for the next alcove. They repeated this process twice, until they reached the end of the hallway and safety. Then, behind them, Kody, Samantha, Reuniclus and Brian did the same. Finally, Shade shot a fireball at the soldiers, creating a distraction while he ran to meet them.

They all made it safely. Gengar, who had recovered from his pain enough to function properly, was floating in the air. "Go back!" Sam ordered. "I'm not losing another one of you! You're hurt, and if you come with us, you'll die! I know it!"

Finally, Gengar gave in and disappeared.

"Good luck to them," said Matt. "They'll need it."

"Maynard!" Corvus yelled. "Give me a report!"

"__It's not going as easily as we thought,"_ said Maynard. "_My men just reported that a group of them escaped, and are heading in your direction."_

Corvus wanted to scream in rage. "Get us reinforcements, then!" he yelled. "And get in the fight yourself! Don't just sit there!"

"__Sir, yes sir."_

They continued down the halls without further incident. It seemed that all of the military force was focused on those they had left behind. They wanted to turn back to help, but they were running out of time.

They rounded a few more corners before they finally came to a thick metal door marked _Control Room._ They tried to open it, but it was locked.

"__I can unlock it,"_ said Reuniclus. "_But there are people in there. I don't know if they're armed or not. We have to be ready."_

"Okay," said Sam. They got into a readied position, pointing their guns forward. Reuniclus started a countdown.

"__5â€| 4â€| 3â€| 2â€|"_

"For Lily," said Sam.

"__1."_

Back with the others, the fight was going badly.

With their numbers depleted, the forces had moved forward, sealing them into the barracks. While they had a strong hold on the door, they didn't know how much longer it would take.

They tried everything, but none of it worked. From Ashmore's fireballs to Swampert's earthquakes; nothing.

"I don't think we're going to last much longer!" Nick yelled.

He was right, Anthony realized. If things proceeded as they were going, they would be overrun. It was just a matter of time.

Someone has to do something, he thought. But what?

He looked around then, and saw the faces of his friends. All of them were frightened, and all of them were about to die. A sudden yearning appeared in his heart; a yearning to save them. He was loyal to his friends, and he didn't want them to die.

He walked up to Andrew and put his hand on his shoulder, then whispered a plan into his ear. His friend immediately shook his head. "No," he said. "No way. I'm not doing it."

"You have to," said Anthony. "It's the only way."

"But you'll die!"

"That's just too fucking bad," said Anthony. "And it's the way things work." As a tear appeared in Andrew's eye, he said, "You kill those bastards, you hear?"

Andrew nodded. "Okay," he said.

"I'll see you around," said Anthony. "Maybe. Good luck."

With that, he raised his gun and pushed through the ranks of the Phoenix soldiers.

Bullets immediately began to deflect off of his armor, but he kept on running. That was the only thing that mattered anymore; running.

As he ran down the hall, he began to think that maybe he would make it after all. But that hope soon turned to bitter realization as a bullet pierced his armor and drove into his back.

He stumbled, and almost fell over, but he kept running. Another bullet hit him, and another.

The fourth one finally brought him down.

As he laid on the ground, bleeding to death, he heard a commotion behind him as his friends took the soldiers from behind. He smiled to himself, and died.

The door opened.

As soon as it did, they rushed into the room, weapons drawn. Immediately, they saw with great satisfaction that the only soldier in the room was Lucas, and he was unarmed.

"Freeze!" Alex yelled. "Stop what you're doing, right now!"

Every hand in the room was raised, and silence descended upon them.

Then, Corvus laughed, and clapped his hands.

"Great job," he said. "You lot got further than any of us ever imagined you could. Still, I'm afraid this is the end of the line." He paced towards a desk, his hand running over the computers. "You can't stop us, you see."

"Get your hand off that computer," Kody warned.

Corvus obliged, but continued talking. "Did you really think you could stop us? You can't win this fight! Even if you take this facility, there will always be a back-up plan. Our organization is far greater than you could ever have imagined."

"Just cut the crap and surrender," said Ben. "You're finished and you know it."

Corvus smiled again. "No," he said. "I don't think so."

Without warning, he lunged at the nearest computer and pressed a button. A timer appeared on the screen above them, counting down from three minutes. The sound of machinery whirring to life filled the room.

Sam shouted, and pulled the trigger of his gun. Unfortunately, his shot went wide. He aimed to try again, but suddenly, the sound of gunfire erupted from behind them.

"It's too late!" Corvus yelled. "We've won!"

They turned to face the new threat; a squad of Phoenix soldiers. Gunfire erupted from both sides as they struggled to hold the control room. Ben tried to make a run for the deactivation switch, but Lucas caught him and threw a punch.

The scientists were all cowering underneath their desks now. Corvus drew his own pistol and started firing at them. The result was complete chaos. The group was pushed back into the room, and desks and walls were peppered with gunfire.

The desks were relatively close together, limiting their fighting space. Eventually, each side was able to disarm the other. Fistfights broke out across the room. Shade was pouncing from soldier to soldier, pinning them down and killing them, or otherwise knocking them out. Helmets were torn off, and bodies were bruised and bloodied. Computers were destroyed and desks overturned, and the fighting went on.

The timer ticked. Thirty seconds left.

Corvus, who had resorted to hiding away in a corner, saw a chance and took it. He raced forward and grabbed Samantha, pulled her into the corner, and ripped off her helmet. He raised his pistol to her head. "I'm going to kill you," he said. "Just like my men were supposed to do all those months ago."

"What?" she started to ask. But she never got a chance to finish the question. For Shade had noticed her plight, and without hesitating, he opened his mouth and shot a fireball at Corvus's feet.

Alex turned back to the fighting as Corvus was flung back towards the wall.

Samantha looked around and saw that the battle was wrapping up. The Phoenix soldiers were on the ground, dead or unconscious. A few were still left, but they were quickly dispatched.

Unbeknownst to them, a single soldier slipped out of the room during the fight.

Lucas was the last to go. He was still wrestling with Ben. The two had taken massive beatings from each other; their faces were swollen with bruises and bleeding from cuts. Yet they fought on. Ben was armored, to his advantage, but Lucas was much stronger than him. He finally was able to overpower his enemy, and closed his hands around his throat.

"I've been waiting so long for this," he said.

Ten seconds left.

In those three seconds, time seemed to slow down for them. She caught Shade's gaze, and the dragon gestured at the two fighting, and opened his mouth. She understood.

As the dragon opened his mouth to produce a ball of fire, she turned towards Ben and Lucas. But she also noticed that Samafntha and Evan were in the way. _"Move!" _she said to Samantha, while Gengar, who had also noticed, turned invisible and pushed Evan behind himself, keeping hold of the teen while allowing the fireball to pass through himself..

The girl got out of the way, but in the heat of the moment Reuniclus kept her link with her open. She turned her attention to Ben, and plucked him out of Lucas's grasp.

"No!" the man yelled as the fire ball hit him.

The timer reached zero, and a shudder passed through the room. The machinery had been damaged in the fight, and was spluttering and coughing around them. The ground quaked, and a loud, shrill ring filled the facility.

A feeling of intense agony spread through Reuniclus's body. She dropped to the ground and screamed. Shade fell onto his side and writhed on the ground, roaring in pain. Matt and Sam lost their footing, and fell screaming. Lucas screamed in agony as the flames ate away at his flesh.

"Someone get to the switch!" Alex yelled. Brian, who was closest, struggled to get to it, stumbling on the way. He reached the desk, which had miraculously survived the fight, and yelled, "I don't know how to turn it off!"

"Look for something!" Kody yelled. "Anything!"

Brian desperately scanned the controls in front of him, until he finally found a red button covered in a glass casing. _Emergency shut-down. _"Found it!" he yelled in triumph. He punched through the glass and hit the button.

The ringing noise stopped. The whir of the machinery and the shuddering of the ground faded into oblivion. The agony that had coursed through those who suffered from its affects faded with it. Lucas was either unconscious or dead, his body red and scarred from the flames which had now burnt out.

They had done it. They had won.

Sam stood up clumsily, and ran over to Brian. He drew his friend into an embrace and said, "You did it. Thank you."

Alex held up his gun and looked at the scientists under the desks. "All of you!" he ordered. "Back of the room! Now!"

"Kody," said Ben. "Go get the others. I want them safe in here before we seal this room off." He turned to Brian and Sam. "You two, see if you can reprogram the Machine to kill zombies only."

"But what about their plan?" asked Matt.

"Trent died to get us here. I'm not about to let him die in vain. Reprogram it."

"Alright," said Sam. He and Brian removed their helmets and bent over the controls and looked through them. "Let's see if I can find anythingâ€¦"

"__Self-destruct sequence initiating,"_ a robotic voice announced. "_Twenty minutes to annihilation."_ An alarm blared.

"What the fuck did you do?!" Kody yelled.

"Nothing!" Sam yelled. "It just happened!"

"Well, shut it down!"

"I can't-"

A gunshot rang through the room.

64. Chapter Sixty-Three: Endgame

****Chapter Sixty-Three:****

****Endgame****

****Inside Mount Washington****

The entire room was silent. Sam felt wet warmth on his hands, and looked down to see them covered in blood. Beside him, Brian slumped against the controls, red liquid trickling from his head.

"NO!" yelled Joey. "Brian!"

Sam ducked out of the way just in time, as another bullet shot past where he had just been standing and hit the controls, destroying them.

Matt and the others whirled to see that Corvus was still alive. Despite his extensive burns, he was alive, and pointing a gun at them.

At _Shade._

Trent's warning raced through his head. _Before this is over, you'll have to make a choice. How much do you love Shade?_

And he knew.

As Corvus pulled the trigger, he jumped right in front of Shade, blocking the bullet's path. It through his weakened armor and buried itself in his chest. The pain was greater than anything he had ever experienced. He hit the ground with a thud and screamed.

"You mother fucker!" Alex screamed. He stormed over to the dying man and held up his gun.

"If I can't haveâ€¦ the world," croaked Corvus. "It can go to the dead. It's too late to stop it now. The infection has evolved."

"Yeah, yeah. Tell it to the fucking judge." said Alex. He was about to pull the trigger, when Shade bounded over to the man and sank his claw into his good eye. This time, he finished the job, and Corvus was killed.

Matt, who was lying on the ground, looked up to see Shade returning to his side. His eyes displayed a mix of shock, confusion, disbelief, and intense sorrow. "I always said I'dâ€¦ die for you," he gasped.

Suddenly, he felt hands underneath him. "Come on, Shade," said Ben. "You have to carry him. We need to get out of here, now!"

They raced through the hallways until they returned to the room they had left the others in. Along the way, the various machinery in the lab was powering down, and the floor shuddered with the blare of the alarm as the facility prepared itself for destruction.

When they arrived, they saw that the battle had been won, and the Phoenix soldiers had retreated. "Thank God you guys are here," said Andrew. "I take it you won?"

"Yeah," said Alex. "But we've got other problems right now. Are you all okay?"

"Not Anthony," said Nick. "Heâ€¦ didn't make it."

A stab of grief ran through Ben's heart, but he didn't have time for that now. "We'll mourn him later," he said. "Go!"

They ran as fast as they could through the hallways until they reached the front entrance again. There, they ran into trouble. Another group of soldiers awaited them there. This group was leaving as well- but they apparently weren't in a big enough hurry to let them pass.

"Fire!" a voice yelled. And the room erupted into a hail of

bullets.

"Why are we wasting our time with this?" Maverick yelled. "We need to leave!"

They had broken through the front door just in time for the alarm to go off. Not knowing what was happening, they entered the facility further, only to discover that the self-destruct sequence had been initiated. They had turned to leave, when their enemies had shown their faces once again.

Now, the fighting had continued, and Maverick didn't care, because he knew it was a lost cause.

The most frustrating thing was that he couldn't order the retreat himself. He had been fired, and his squad wouldn't listen to him. He couldn't even walk on his own because of the bullet in his leg. He was a mess.

Now, here he was, slumped against the wall at the back of his army.

Suddenly, a finger poked the back of his armor. He looked up to see General Maynard standing over him.

"Come on, Maverick," he said. "This is hopeless."

"You don't need to tell me that," he said. "But we can't get out unless we take this route. Why do you want to go further into the facility?"

"Because this isn't the only way out," said Maynard. "Come on, I'll help you."

He helped Maverick to his feet, and the two of them walked slowly through the facility. On the way, Maynard explained everything.

"There was a back door built into this place in case of emergencies," he said. "It leads to the back of the Cog Railway station at the foot of the mountain. I knew the base was lost as soon as my men lost the upper hand in the Control Room. There was a fight there, and we lost. I slipped out before they could get me and primed it."

They reached a door with the words `_Do Not Enter; Authorized Personal Only_` written on it. Next to it was a keypad. Maynard typed in a six-digit code and the door slid open, revealing a large elevator. The two of them entered the elevator, and Maynard said, "Wait here. I'll be right back; I need to grab something, and then we can leave."

A few minutes into the fight, Samantha decided she'd had enough. She pushed ahead of the others and threw down her gun.

"This is stupid!" she screamed, enough to get even the Phoenix soldiers to stop firing momentarily. "This whole facility is about to blow, and we're sitting here, blocking the exit and shooting each other!"

"We can't allow you to leave," said one soldier. "We may have failed

in our mission to protect this facility, but we will not fail in killing you."

"And you'll die yourself in the process," said Samantha. "The Boss is dead," she lied. "We killed him ourselves. You have nothing left here. So just walk away!"

"You're lying," said the soldier.

"Am I?" she asked. "Can you prove it?"

The soldier said nothing. Nobody said anything. There was nothing except for the noise of the blaring alarm.

"No," she said. "You can't. Now do you really want to risk your life for that?"

The soldier took a few precious seconds to consider. Then, he said, "Fine. Just this once. But I'm warning you; this isn't over. Phoenix will have its revenge."

"We'll be waiting," said Samantha.

And just like that, the fighting was done. The Phoenix army filed through the doorway into the stairwell, and then they were alone.

She turned to see the others staring at her in shock.

"What are you waiting for?" she asked. "Come on!"

They ran up the stairs, and emerged into the light. The Phoenix army that had been there before had broken up, and were running off into the trees.

They ran. Those that couldn't rode on the backs of the dragons and Swampert. They ran and ran and ran until they felt like they couldn't run any further. Even then they still weren't out of the danger zone. They began to wonder if they would make it.

The mountaintop exploded.

Samantha risked a quick glance behind her and saw the top break apart in a storm of boulders and dirt and trees and snow. A massive fireball rose into the sky, and black smoke streamed everywhere.

They weren't going to make it.

"Hurry up!" she yelled. The boulders arced higher into the sky, and before long they crashed into the ground. They landed perilously close to her and her friends. They continued to run. They had no choice. They couldn't stop.

More explosions echoed from where the first had gone off. More rubble rained from the sky. But they pushed on.

The rain and explosions finally stopped. Rubble still rained on them, but it was reduced to small clumps of dirt at most. Samantha looked up at the mountain, and saw a horrifying sight. It had been shortened

by almost a whole third, and the peak had been reduced to a massive crater. Fire licked its edges, and the skyline had turned black above it as thick smoke polluted it.

The thought occurred to her that they had succeeded. They had survived. But as hard as she tried, she couldn't feel happy. They had lost so much in the process- and she had done things she had sworn she would never do. She had killed.

But she could worry about that later. Right now, they had wounded that needed treating. They needed to go home.

She turned to see Alena walking towards her. The two girls hugged each other tightly. "We did it," said Alena. "We actually did it."

They had lived to see another day.

65. Chapter Sixty-Four: The Final Day

****Chapter Sixty-Four:****

****The Final Day****

****At the base of Mount Washington, New Hampshire****

Underneath the smoking skies of Mount Washington, the group stood in a circle around five stone grave markers stuck in the earth. The stones had been created and implanted with Swampert's help. The stones were big, with intricate designs running down the sides, and messages of love to those they had lost on the front.

One by one, each of five people chosen to speak stood forward and laid a flower at the base of the grave, then spoke. Ben spoke first for Jeremy. Then Kody for Jean, Sam for Lily, Andrew for Anthony, and Joey for Brian. It was hard on them, and some of them broke down into tears before they were finished, but they made it through. After every speech was complete, the speaker would place his flower on his appointed grave.

Then, they moved onto a sixth monument. Gigalith's monument. In her death, Gigalith had done so much more for them. To make up for this, they had made it much more intricate than the others.

"Gigalith," said Sam. "You never deserved any of this. You should have had a life with all of us, but instead you were lonely and rejected, and met a terrible death. I'm sorry."

When this was all done, the funeral was complete. They all bowed their heads in silence, some crying, some completely quiet. When they broke up, they returned to their cars to drive home.

They returned home and established a watch. Since their return, they hadn't seen any living zombies, but that didn't mean there weren't any around. They had to be prepared.

Kody, Alena, and Swampert stood guard. The rest stayed inside. The humans sat on couches and chairs in the living room. Ben took out a bottle of whiskey and poured them some shots, while others had water

bottles. The Pokémon stayed sitting in the room as well. Ashmore went in search of Shade.

The smaller Night Fury hadn't attended the funeral with them. He had stayed by Matt's side all night, and most of the day so far. The human's sacrifice had stirred his emotions, and he had forgiven the human of what he had done.

The teen wasn't dead yet; Reuniclus had managed to remove the bullet and close the wound. But they weren't yet sure if it was enough. Matt had lost a lot of blood, and was still unconscious. It was too early to tell, but things weren't looking good for him.

As Ashmore entered the room, he saw his friend curled up next to the bed. He looked up as the bigger Fury approached. "Hey," he said. "How was the funeral?"

"As good as a funeral can be, I guess," said Ashmore. "Any change?"

Shade shook his head. "No," he said.

Ashmore sighed. "You should get some rest," he said. "You've been sitting here all night. Have you even slept?"

"A little bit, here and there," said Shade. "I'm fine."

"No, you aren't," said Ashmore. "I'm worried about you."

"Don't be," said Shade. "I'll be fine."

Ashmore sighed. Somehow he didn't believe that. "Do you need anything?" he asked.

"No, I'm fine," said Shade again. With that, he curled back up and closed his eyes.

Back in the living room, conversation had begun.

"Well," said Ben, pouring his third shot. "That's it then."

"Yeah," said Joey hollowly.

"I know this all sucks really badly," said Alena. "But I think we should look on the bright side. It's what they would have wanted. They may have been dead, but we're still alive."

"Yeah," said Alex. "We'll make sure their deaths weren't for nothing." He lifted his glass of whiskey and said, "To them."

"To them," everyone else repeated. They took a shot.

"Still, though," said Joey. "This is really hard. Brian and I were the only ones left from our circle of friends that escaped the school on Z-Day. I know it doesn't mean that much in the long run, but to me it does. I'm the only one left. It feels like I lost my family."

"Don't ever say it doesn't mean much," said Samantha. "It means everything. Without each other, we're nothing."

Later on, Samantha was talking to Alena alone.

"Something's been bothering me," she confessed. "When we were in the lab, I got close to Corvus. He almost killed me, and he said somethingâ€¦"

"What did he say?" Alena asked.

"He said that his men were supposed to kill me months ago."

A dark silence passed between them, as Alena immediately understood the implications of the statement. Eventually, she said, "You don't thinkâ€¦?"

"I do think," said Samantha. "Phoenix had something to do with my past. I just need to find out what."

Alena considered for a moment, then said, "I've been thinking of something. I don't believe Phoenix is gone. They'll take a bit to regroup, yes, but they'll come back. This fight isn't over yet. I think we need to leave New Hampshire and go after them."

"Wellâ€¦ where?" asked Samantha.

"I don't know yet. But I'm sure I could get some people to help. Ben and Joey, especially. They both lost their best friends. And you. You could find out what they know about you."

The offer was tempting, but Samantha wasn't sure. "I don't knowâ€¦" she said. "I'll have to think about it."

Alena grinned. "That's okay. Take your time."

Now, the only thing left for Sam to do was reveal the truth to the others about his coming demise.

He had less than a day to live. When he thought about it, it seemed strange. He felt fine- well, apart from the depression and fatigue from the battle, anyway. He was going to die, yet he didn't feel like anything was wrong with his health. But that didn't change the facts. He was going to die, and he needed to tell his friends.

One by one, he visited the remaining PokÃ©mon and broke the news to them. Some were affected by the news more visibly than others, but they all took it hard. Jack and Swampert wept openly (as much as they could). Swampert, in fact, had reacted even worse than Sam had anticipated. The death of Lily had broken him somewhat, and this made things even worse. Gengar hid it well, but Sam could tell he was distraught on the inside. Even Elizabeth was sad about it.

Then, he went to visit Ashmore.

The dragon was still angry at him, that much was for sure. When Sam entered the otherwise-empty room that the dragon had chosen as his resting place, he had gotten up as if to leave. Sam stopped him with a greeting. "Hey," he said. "Please don't go. There's something I need to tell you, and this maybe be the last time I can."

The Night Fury seemed to sense the desperation in his voice, for he

sat back down and listened. Sam pulled up a rocking chair that was stationed next to a window and sat down in front of him, trying to think of a way to begin. "Wellâ€¦" he said. "I'm glad you're alive. I truly am. I never meant to cause any of thisâ€¦" He trailed off as the dragon flicked his tail in annoyance, telling him to get to his point. "Right, sorry," he said. "Wellâ€¦ The truth is, I'm dying."

Ashmore's pupil's dilated in shock, and for a moment, Sam thought he saw an indescribable grief pass through them. But it was gone seconds later.

Sam went on to explain everything about the dragon blood in his veins, and about how he was going to die later that day.

"And that's it," he said. "I'm dying." He paused for a moment, hoping that Ashmore would do something- reach out to him, make things right- anything. But he didn't. He just sat there, staring at the human in shock.

Sam stood up then. "I'm sorry for everything, Ashmore," he said. "It's been wonderful knowing you. Better than you'll ever know."

He left the room then, and went to tell Shade. He would tell the others afterwards, but Shade was alone, so Sam wanted to tell him separately. As he entered the bedroom, he saw that nothing had changed. Matt was still unconscious, and Shade was still curled up beside the bed.

As the human entered the room, the dragon sat up and looked at him. "Hey," Sam greeted. "Any change?"

Shade shook his head.

"Listen, I need to talk to you about somethingâ€¦"

Shade tilted his head questioningly. Sam opened his mouth to speak, when a moan filled the room from the bed. Both of their eyes darted to it, and saw Matt shifted faintly under the covers.

"Is heâ€¦?" Sam asked. His question was answered as Matt opened his eyes groggily.

"Whaâ€¦?" he asked. "Where am I?"

Both of them looked on in stunned silence. Sam couldn't believe it. His friend had pulled through.

"Mattâ€¦!" he said. Shade bolted to his feet and looked over him, and Sam stood at the foot of the bed. "I can't believe you're still alive!"

"Heyâ€¦. Sam," he said. "Did we win?"

Sam nodded, tears of joy filling his eyes. "Yeah," he said. "We did. We thought we had lost you though."

"Wellâ€¦ Guess not," Matt said, his hand absentmindedly feeling his wound.

Sam looked at Shade, and saw that his face was filled with pure joy. _Looks like that friendship is fixed,_ he said, feeling sorrow for his own damaged friendship.

"I'll give you two sometime alone," he said. He turned and exited the room.

"Shadeâ€¦" said Matt. He lifted a hand weakly to touch the dragon's muzzle. The dragon purred, and nudged his face happily. Then, his expression changed to one of exasperation. The message in it was clear; _how could you do that? You almost died!_

"Sorry, budâ€¦" said Matt, "But I wasn't about to let you die. Not while I'm still alive."

He then explained the warning Trent had given him in his dream. _Before this is all over, you'll have to make a choice._

"I made my choice," Matt said. "I took a bullet for you. I chose you over myself."

Shade buried his face in Matt's chest. Weakly, Matt lifted his arms and curled them around his best friend's head.

Matt had been through hell. He had been in battles, watched his friends die, and killed. But what he said next was the hardest obstacle he'd ever faced. With one sentence, he destroyed his best friend's happiness.

"Shadeâ€¦ I'm dying."

The dragon stiffened, and then his head rose from his chest, looking him in the eye. A deep, helpless confusion could be seen in his green orbs. _Butâ€¦ But you're awakeâ€¦ You survived the bullet!_

Matt shook his head. "It's not the bullet," he said. He then told him everything that Corvus had done to him. By the time he was done with his story, his eyes had filled with tears, and his voice was breaking. Shade's gaze was filled with an unbearable grief.

When the story was over, Matt said, "Come here." He held out his arms, and the dragon allowed himself to be hugged again.

"I'm so sorry for everything that I've done," Matt choked through his tears. "I should have told you right from the start. Can you forgive me?"

It was clear from the dragon's actions that he could.

Then, Matt broke down into sobs. He cried loudly into his dragon friend's neck, and Shade himself shuddered from his grief. They stayed like this for several minutes, before Matt finally regained his composure enough to speak.

"From now on, no more secrets," Matt promised. "I'm going to tell you everything. And that meansâ€¦"

Shade tensed. He knew what this meant.

"This is the story," Matt began. "To be honest, I don't know why it's

bothered me so goddamn much. I've probably done worse stuff in the last few weeks. But I'm a lot more hardened now than I was then. You never really forget your first kill.

"It happened on Z-Day. We were in the city when the zombies broke out. As we ran through the streets, it looked like something from a horror movie. People were being killed left and right. Even though I've seen it a lot since, that has always been the most frightening experience to me.

"Anyway, as we ran, the street ahead was blocked off. We ducked into an alley- it was me, my parents, my sister, and my cousin and her family. There was a ladder dropped from a fire escape, and we climbed it. As we did so, another man joined our party. He climbed up last."

Matt stopped, and took a deep breath. "I'll never forget his face.

"When we reached the top of the ladder, we climbed onto someone's balcony. I reached it first, and found a gun on the ground next to it, so I snatched it up. Then, knowing that there might be more inside the house, I stepped aside and let the others through.

The man came last. But just when we thought we had gotten through safely, a zombie lunged out of the house and onto the man. I had to think fast, and I raised my gun to shootâ€¦ Onlyâ€¦"

He stopped, and his voice shuddered. "Only I couldn't do it. I couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger. You see, I was a very non-violent person before all of this. And despite everything I knew about the zombies, they still looked human. They felt too much like a human. So I froze up.

"Unfortunately, I froze for too long. The zombie bit into the man's neck, and he died screaming. The last look he gave me was one I never forgot. It was a mixture of horror, revulsion- and fury. He blamed me for his death, and with every ounce of his being he hated me for it.

"After he finally died, my dad came back down and dragged me away. We didn't even kill the zombie that did it."

Matt took a deep breath, and then looked Shade in the eye. "So there you have it," he said. "Now you know what happened. Now you know why I keep having nightmares, and why I've never been able to get over it or forgive myself."

Shade didn't know how to react. Matt misinterpreted this as a discomfort, and said, "I can understand if this has changed your opinion of me. You thought of me as a nice guy, I know, but I couldn't even save someone with the gun in my hand. I'm-

Shade silenced him with a swish of his tail. He nudged him knowingly, in a gestured that meant, I understand. Nothing's changed.

Matt's heart filled with joy at that. "Thank you," he said. "It feels good to finally get that off of my chest."

He wrapped another arm around the dragon's neck, and said, "It's been

so nice knowing you. I'll miss you on the other side. But I know we'll meet again one day."

They spent the rest of the hour in silence, hugging each other in one final embrace.

The others didn't take the news well.

The mood had just begun to lighten up when Sam had broken the news. Their moods immediately became bleak again. Later on, they received word that Matt was dying as well. More tears were shed for both of them, and more than a few holes were punched into the wall.

At four o'clock that afternoon, they all gathered in the living room to see their friends off into the land of death. Even Matt was brought in, despite his injury.

There were heartbreaking goodbyes. Then, Sam and Matt waited to die.

They cooked some food, but nobody could really eat. The mood was dark and dismal, and even though they tried to pass the time with conversation about their favorite memories with each other, the passage wasn't helped.

Three hours passed.

Sam gradually became more and more confused. He was almost a hundred percent sure that this form of death was meant to be excruciating. So why wasn't he feeling anything? He didn't feel sick at all. He felt weary and tired, yes, but not sick, or even wounded.

_This is too weird, _he thought.

Still, he was certain he wouldn't make it through the night. They waited some more, and the hours ticked by, yet nothing happened. The sky darkened and the moon rose; a brilliant full moon that covered the land in a silvery light. Then the moon fell back down, and the sun returned.

Matt and Sam were still alive.

Somehow, they had made it through the night. Each member of the group began to feel hope once again- especially Matt and Sam. But they didn't allow their spirits to rise too high. After all; it could have been a fluke. They weren't safe yet.

Yet the days passed by as well. And a few days later, they felt no different. Matt even felt a little better. Slowly, they realized that they had miraculously survived.

Matt reflected that maybe this was something worse. But at the moment, he didn't care. He felt alright. And even though they had suffered a lot of losses, and he deeply mourned them, he still had friends in this world.

And, most importantly of all, he was alive to face a new day.

****End of Part Three****

66. Epilogue

****Epilogue****

****Mount Washington Valley, New Hampshire****

Three weeks passed.

A lot had changed. Not a single zombie had been seen since the battle. Many of them theorized that the Machine had, in part, worked. They were still grieving, but they had begun to look towards the future.

Their group was splitting up. They all knew Phoenix hadn't been defeated, and most of them wanted to go after them. Only Sam and his Pok mon wanted to stay. Matt was staying as well; his wound hadn't healed enough for him to travel. Shade was staying with him, and Ashmore was staying with Shade. Everyone else was leaving.

They wanted to depart as soon as possible. The only reason they hadn't left yet was that Samantha was working on something. When she was done, she had crafted four transceivers; two for the group that was staying, and two for the group that was leaving.

When questioned, she explained; "They manipulate radio waves to send out a signal. Basically, they're distress beacons."

Her friends received the gifts with open arms and wide smiles. They thought it was a great idea.

Now, the day had come for them to leave. Matt, Sam, the dragons, and the Pok mon saw them away. There were many heartfelt goodbyes.

Matt went up to Ben. "Hey," he said. "Promise me I'll see you again."

"You will, don't worry. You're not getting rid of me that easily! Impossible is my specialty," he said, grinning.

"So where are you going?" Matt asked.

"I'm not sure," said Ben. "New York, to start. That's where we think they'll be the strongest. After that, who knows? How about you?"

"I don't know  " said Matt. "I know Sam wants to try and figure out why we aren't dead yet, as well as how Gigalith grew so quickly. We'll probably end up finding a lab."

"Well, you be careful," said Ben. "Those places are fucked. Good luck."

"Keep your luck," said Matt. "You need it more than we do."

"I suppose so," said Ben. With that, they drew each other into a friendly hug.

"Stay strong," said Matt.

"Stick 'em with the pointy end, Mattias." Ben said laughing. "I'm

sure you remember that."

He went around to say goodbye to the rest of them- Joey, Alena, Samantha, Alex, Andrew, Kody, Nick and Evan. Then, they departed.

As they watched their friends leave, Matt turned to Sam. "What do you think happens next?" he asked.

Sam shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "But I hope the worst is behind us."

Matt wanted to believe that was true, but he knew he couldn't. Trent's words echoed through his mind_. I know the end may feel close, but it's not. Your trials are just beginning. You guys have a long, hard road ahead of you. I can't even describe the horrors that you're destined to face._

"No," he said. "No, I think there's still a hard road ahead. But I think we can make it through."

"_Hey guys, this is EOD radio, once again!_"

So yeah, it's been a while. I don't even know if you guys are still there- if you ever were there in the first place. But I just want you to know that, for now, I'm safe.

I don't think I'll be doing this anymore. As fun as this was, the road ahead for me is a dangerous one. I can't afford to have this station up and running anymore. It's sad, I know, but it has to be done. You all take care of yourselves while I'm gone. Maybe I can try again, when I'm not bleeding in the dirt for the fate of humanity.

But there is good news. We won the fight. You probably have no idea what I mean by that, but it's good. You may have noticed a startling lack of zombies in the area over the past three weeks. Yeah, we were involved with that. You're welcome.

We've lost a lot of people in the process. I don't think we'll ever be the same after that. Our friends died horribly, but they died with their humanity still intact. That's the only thing that consoles me during the night, really.

I've got to wrap this up, but before I go, I'd like to honor the dead. Farewell Trent, Jeremy, Jean, Lily, Anthony, and Brian. I'll never forget you. Any of you.

I don't really have much else to say. Well, nothing that you'll believe. I'll end this here. To all of you who might be listening, keep trudging along. If there's one thing I've learned over the past few weeks- other than that secret societies are the worst things ever- it's that there might be a way out of this after all. There might just be a light at the end of this tunnel. I don't know when it'll come, but I think it will eventually. I believe that. You should too.

But until then, we wait. For now, let's wait with some music. This is Ben Chretien, signing off."

****End of Book One****

Dear Reader,

The preceding manuscript has been the first of four volumes chronicling the most important struggle the world has ever seen.

It has, of course, been dramatized- to an extent- partially to make it easier to read, and partially because that was how I preferred to write it. The facts are, however, completely accurateâ€”for the most part. Why should you trust me? Because I was there. Of course, I don't remember every detail, and I can't tell you what others were thinking, but I believe this is as accurate as I can make it.

The war- the one many now have named The War of Flames, or The War of the Dead- has not yet begun in this narrative, not truly, but it is very close at hand. In the next volume, we will see how wars begin.

But there is something else coming as well. Dr. Jack Corvus, our greatest adversary at the time, was killed in the Battle of Mount Washington. But at the point this narrative has left off, another, far greater enemy is emerging from his ashes like the Phoenix he is. This enemy will, in time, become our greatest nemesis; an enemy of unimaginable power.

The Firebreather is rising.

November 1, 2011- June 2, 2013

67. Part Two has begun!

s/11629622/1/The-War-of-the-Dead-The-Rise-of-the-Firebreather

****Part two is up! Or, at least, the beginning of it.****

End
file.